



no

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1. Used to express refusal, denial, disbelief or disagreement.
2. Not at all.

-The American Heritage Dictionary

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"Boyd Rice could be the next John F. Kennedy or Jesus Christ.
He can make the lame walk and can heal even me. Thank you for
existing, Boyd! I hear your next book is going to be the new bible."

Kim Fowley

"...one of American counter culture's most visible and vocal *enfants
terribles* —an outsider among the outsiders,"

Brian M. Clark

A Boyd Rice Biography

"(Boyd Rice) is a bad influence."

Der Spiegel

“All modern thought is permeated by the idea of thinking the unthinkable”.

Michel Foucault

“All modern thought is predicated upon belief in the unbelievable”.

Boyd Rice

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PROLOGUE

As a young man, I was told by an older man that the most important jobs in the world were left undone, either because they were far too messy, or because no one recognized them. Many lacked the ability to perform such tasks, he said, because they lacked the basic perception to see they even existed. To those who recognized them, the responsibility fell into their laps to do their part to deal with them, even if only speaking out to draw attention. But even this, he asserted, was a dangerous undertaking.

He was right. If there's a clear cut problem everyone is ignoring, there's probably a reason. If you're the guy to point it out to all & sundry, expect the worst.

At a younger age, I had a friend who had a large family & lived in a large house. They had a dog. On an almost daily basis the dog would shit on the rug in the middle of the living room, or on the hardwood floor in the hall. The rule of the household was that the first person to see the shit would have to clean it up. Consequently, everyone in the family pretended not to see it, would walk right past it. No one wanted to do the dirty work.

As a result, the entire place smelled of shit most of the time — and it was an extremely nice place otherwise. Any stranger entering the premises would immediately comment on the offensive odor. The residents obviously preferred tolerating the noxious smell, than performing the simple but dirty task of dealing with it.

Is this a simile for The Modern World somehow?

I'm sure I can't say...

INTRODUCTION

For several decades now I have remained steadfast in my assertion that life's realities exist separate & distinct from beliefs, that real things or conditions don't require belief per se. Only falsehoods do. Were I to scribble out a volume outlining my core beliefs, it would either be very thin, or perhaps nonexistent.

Consequently, in explaining my thought or describing my observations, it has been necessary to discuss those things I don't believe, and why.

One bad idea or false belief could ruin your entire life. Try to imagine a world in which virtually every idea, belief, or value is fundamentally untrue; and how living in that world might negatively impact your life.

Now recognize the truth: This is the world in which you now live, a world defined by falsehoods. People are full of shit, and the ideals they cling to are little more than flattering conceits. Lies. No big deal, really, except that these lies constitute the basis of modern democratic civilization.

This is not philosophy. I don't believe in philosophy. This is a mere collection of observations.

Any given individual's observations are predicated upon what he has seen, or experienced, and therefore are personal. To a degree. Were he to tell you that such observations were somehow objective he would be misrepresenting the facts, both to you and himself.

What I question is the extent to which any of us truly knows what the facts really are. I mistrust every ideal cherished in western democratic civilization. The words that make others smile and nod in agreement cause me to recoil.

Insofar as I can figure, I seem to have been born a sociopath of sorts. The sort of emotions enjoyed and shared by most of humankind seem to have eluded me. As a younger man I flattered myself that this condition granted me a greater degree of objectivity than most of my fellows could experience.

To some degree, this may be true, but it's not the whole truth.

These are the musings of an outsider, not an objectivist.

LIES

"One of the most striking differences between a cat and a lie is that a cat only has nine lives."

Mark Twain

"Even a lie may be the truth."

Tiny Tim

The most dangerous lies are not so much things we consciously conspire to spread for sake of dissimulation, as they are things we unconsciously embrace, unknowingly and unwittingly.

The lies spread purposely are relatively few in contrast to those perpetuated inadvertently and without intent. The lies people make up for purposes of self aggrandizement, or to cover their ass, or explain why something couldn't possibly be their fault are fairly obvious, and transparent. They aren't inherently a threat to you because you can often spot them from a block away.

The dangerous lies are the ones we never see because they're a kind of cultural wallpaper, or in fact constitute the very foundation of the culture into which we were born. We've grown up amongst them, surrounded by them, in a world literally *defined* by them.

Many of these lies are things we imagine to be the fundamental truths that we *hold to be self-evident*. Of course, any truth that's genuinely self-evident needn't be written about, it would already be universally recognized. Presumably.

If, in the past, honesty, justice and rationality were the pleasant abstractions to be bandied about, today's ideals are even more nebulous and ghostlike. Today, man rallies around such notions as equality, individuality and liberty, concepts that are everywhere lauded, yet nowhere demonstrable.

EQUALITY

"All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others."
George Orwell

Surely one of the major conundrums of the modern age must be this: If we are all indeed unique individuals, why would we desire something as common as *equality*?

Or: If we are all truly equal, and we genuinely honor the notion of equality; why would we harbor the desire to defile its sanctity by exhibiting selfish/egocentric traits which could be deemed individualistic?

Or, more to the point — how can two such mutually exclusive seeming ideals constitute the defining ethic of a worldview? How can the two exist side by side as key facets of the popular consciousness?

First things first — equality.

Have you ever seen a demonstrable example of equality in your entire life? Can it be glimpsed in any dog show or classroom? In any ping pong game or chess match? Of course not. It is a philosophical abstraction, something nowhere to be found in nature. Is 50 pounds of lead somehow equal to 50 pounds of gold? And if you say yes, what do you even mean by equal?

Equality is only a condition esteemed by all those who imagine they don't measure-up somehow. The Donald Trumps and Michael Eisners of the world neither revere the concept, nor aspire to it.

Semantic hairsplitters will inform you that the founding fathers true meaning was not "all men are created *equal*" but rather "all men are *created* equal." This implies that subsequent to birth, our innate equality was subject to a myriad of influences, choices, and environmental factors, all of which gave rise to the seeming abyss which exists between us and those who both soar above us and flounder beneath us.

Of course, the founding fathers were mostly lawyers, gifted bullshit artists. The constitution, for all its merits, is a document full of flattering conceits. Conceits which constitute the very bedrock of modern democracy.

If equality existed as the natural basis of anything whatsoever, it wouldn't require any lip service whatsoever. It couldn't be so easily countermanded by the unfair actions of those seeking to undermine it. It's self-evident absence in the workings of our world would never need to be so widely bemoaned.

The fact that more than 200 years on, our law makers are still debating laws to enforce equality, to sanction it, speaks volumes. Realities don't

require votes or majorities. Nor could votes or majorities affect genuine realities.

If the house and senate voted unanimously to outlaw winter, they'd still have to bundle up in December, and their heating bills would remain the same.

Do you imagine that those who run things actually entertain the concept of equality? Do *you*? Is the C.E.O. of McDonald's equal to the person who manages the store or makes the fries? Of course not. But if you imagine the C.E.O. is an evil rat bastard while his employees are honest hard-working citizens, the question arises: why is your faith in the concept of equality so seemingly selective?

Would you switch places with the downs syndrome guy who bags your groceries at the supermarket, or the turban wearing fellow who drives your taxi home from the airport? And if not, why not? Because you think you're *better* than them? Have greater skills? More to offer? Maybe so. And what's wrong with that?

We exist in a vast hierarchy. And most of us wish to advance upwards within it. We want more, never less. And never, certainly, the same as the next guy. We speak of equality, but no one truly desires it. If you've ever really met someone who wants exactly the same as his fellow man, kill him. He's some sort of pod person, not a human being.

Peek into any microcosm you wish and look for the presence of equality. You won't find it. Look for evidence of inequality, however, and you'll find it in spades.

Pretty sounding lies and abstractions hold great sway over the minds and hearts of mankind. Many are willing to fight and lay down their lives for such fare. Unpleasant truths meet resistance because truth lacks the capacity to flatter mens conceits as falsehoods do.

Speak of *equality* and the man in the crowd takes pride in the fact that he is "every bit as good" as the next guy.

Mention inequality, and he doesn't want to hear it. It has been stated that true equality between men can only ever be seen in death. Death is the great equalizer. It strips us of rank, status, and power. It renders all those things that separated us in life invalid and irrelevant. Such a harsh proclamation *sounds* right, but even it is a falsehood. Even death is powerless to confer equality. Some leave behind a prettier corpse than others. Some make great organ donors while others do not. Some repose in lavish ostentatious mausoleums, while others are disposed of in unmarked paupers graves or potters fields.

INDIVIDUALITY

"We are all unique individuals, no two of us alike."
Copy from a television ad for a cell phone plan

On June 6th, 2006 an occult sect held a public ceremony in Hollywood, California (6-6-6, get it?). The media was invited and coverage ensued. The main question asked of participants was what was this sect really all about — was it a genuine religion? The answer was almost always identical, as though scripted: "Our group", they said, "is not a religion or belief, but rather a philosophy of individualists — a clearing house for people expressing their individuality." Sounds great in concept, yet why would so many *individualists* say exactly the same thing, word for word?

Stranger yet, those responding to such questions all look virtually identical. All were dressed in black: black suits, shirts and ties. Many had shaved heads and goatees, mimicking the iconoclastic image of their founder.

How is it that people so fervently devoted to "expressing individuality" should come together in such a sea of undifferentiated conformity?

Could it be that the concept of individuality is an empty construct, every bit as meaningless as that of equality? The proof of the pudding, as they say, is in the tasting.

Once again, individuality exists as an ideal to be aspired to rather than an actuality to be manifested. It is an abstraction, a symbol. Contemporary society adores abstractions and symbols.

The concept of individuality is everywhere heralded, yet nowhere to be seen. It is trumpeted the most by those who embody it the least.

If a despotic form of rule wanted to keep its populace in line, only the most foolish regime would tell its people: "Do as we say, or you'll be punished". No, the surest way is to inform them they're *free* and *equal*. That they're all *unique individuals*.

Man's bottom line behavior and public proclamations are rarely, if ever, one and the same. People desire individuality, but are desperately in need of identity; and the two are not synonymous. Identity is to be found within the context of the group, never in no man's land, a fortress of solitude, or some remote mountaintop.

Identity resides within group-thought, group-belief, group-fashion. It is to be found in fads, sects, and subcultures. Its uniforms, accoutrements, and accessories can be purchased over the counter, because they are mass produced. Uniqueness plays no role in identity, nor could it. Uniqueness, by its very nature, is its utter antithesis.

So where exactly is the place where identity and individuality intersect or overlap? Don't bother to look for it, because it doesn't exist, except as an abstraction in the minds of those who desire both and possess neither.

LIBERTY

"Let every nation know, whether it wishes us good or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and success of liberty."

John F. Kennedy

No less a figure than Benito Mussolini proclaimed that "liberty is a duty, not a right". What the hell did he mean by that? Why did the architect of fascism extol the virtues of liberty?

Undoubtedly, Mussolini appreciated the fact that most such ideals are vacuous abstractions, with little or no basis in demonstrable realities. They appeal to the emotions, and subsequently bypass the intellect. If such a class existed, you'd learn this in DEMAGOGUERY 101, in the first semester. Thomas Jefferson understood it all a hundred and fifty years before Mussolini.

Everyone desires liberty, yet few seem able to quantify it or define what it means. If you had ten times more liberty tomorrow than you do today, what might you be able to do then that you can't do now? Would you shoot someone? Smoke in a restaurant? Scream in a library?

Liberty is equated with freedom: the freedom of actions. Your freedom to shoot someone obviously interferes with their freedom not to be shot.

Therein lays the paradox of liberty — it can never exist in a democracy; despite the fact that it's posited as a cornerstone of that system. One man declares his "constitutional right" of *freedom of speech*, while another cites "civil rights" which guard against hurtful *hate speech*. Both are equally pathetic. Both expect some outside entity (the government or lawyers) to vouch-safe their *rights*. If your concept of liberty includes the government or lawyers, lay down and slice your wrists right now. All is lost.

PEACE

*"The document I hold in my hand guarantees peace in our time."
Chamberlain, upon returning to London after his meeting with
Adolf Hitler*

"If you want peace, create justice", so the bumper stickers preach to us. It might be amended, "and to create justice, exterminate all those shit-disturbers whose very presence detracts from such peace".

The only times that peace has ever prevailed have been those in which some despots have been brutal enough or feared enough to impose it. There was no crime in the regime of Vlad The Impaler, unless, of course you consider the punishments meted out for breaking his rules to be criminal. Folks understood that breaking the law might result in being skewered with a large pointed stick inserted through their ass. Romania was a very safe place to live, so long as one followed the rules to a "T".

There was peace under the rule of Draco, also a great stickler for law and order. But some of his friends perhaps imagined him a bit overzealous in his means of administering justice. Once, when asked if the death penalty was really an appropriate sentence for the crime of stealing a potato, he answered in the negative. "But," he added, "if there was something more severe I'd surely consider it." from his system of justice is derived our modern term "Draconian".

Apart from these few isolated historical footnotes, peace has remained an abstract ideal rather than a tangible reality. Wars, genocide, massacres, pogroms, conflict, insurrections, rebellions, assassinations, slaughters, holocausts, et al, have perennially been the order of the day. Never peace.

Our mania for peace came to a boil in the sixties when our youth were sent off to fight and die in a place we'd never heard of, in a war we never fully understood, half way around the world. All that most people knew of this war was the death toll, cited alongside football scores on the nightly news. The statistics, the numbers, were all abstractions to most viewers, unless you were young and had a favorite cousin shipped there. My favorite cousin, Tom, came back, but not before contracting some water borne virus predicted to end his life a decade or two early.

The compulsion for peace (as a rallying concept) was a reaction to a very real war, and undoubtedly not an illogical reaction. The continuing, ongoing demand for peace on the part of the counter culture (or culture at large) has no basis in logic, considering the current state of affairs in the world, or it's known history going back over millennia.

Prior to World War II, the League of Nations published a volume

called "Is World Peace Possible?" It put this question to the best and brightest of its day, the most well known thinkers of the 20th century: Winston Churchill, Eleanor Roosevelt, Albert Einstein, Albert Schweitzer and so on. The responses it received were glowing and optimistic. Certainly! Man can accomplish anything he sets his mind to. The world most assuredly desires peace, and races and nations can work together, hand in hand, to bring it about! Universal brotherhood was indeed within reach. The *peaceable kingdom* was at hand.

Yet even within this feel-good tome, a solitary voice of dissent stood out. They'd made the mistake of putting the question to Oswald Spengler. Spengler's reply came back a resounding NO. Even if most men truly desired peace, he reasoned, imposing it as some false condition would constitute an impossibility. However many intelligent and supposedly enlightened people might desire it, they would always be outnumbered by those who had far less and wanted far more. Those who felt no compunction in taking what they wanted — or felt they *deserved* by means of force and violence. This, he reasoned, is how it always has been, and shall remain.

Oswald further opined that however strong the will to peace might be, it will never be shared by all; most especially by those who feel intensely that they are on a low rung of the ladder while another sits atop it. They have no desire for the much heralded peaceful co-existence, but rather to knock the top man from his position in order to claim it as their own. This is not so much harsh philosophy, as it is basic psychology, really.

Man speaks of peace and wages war. Today's warmongers label their actions as "peace-keeping missions", a phrase that certainly has a nice ring to it. But call it what you will, things remain the same, now as ever. The same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Spengler was not, after all is said and done, a pessimist. Spengler was right. And what say you? Do you expect things to get better *or worse*?

HARMONY

"You believe that easily which you hope for earnestly."
Terence

Someone once asked "why can't we all just get along?". Simple: because we hate each other. Or at least a good many of us intensely mistrust and resent one another. The poor hate the rich. A lot of blacks will tell you most whites are racists. A lot of women feel that males are a bunch of mean, unfair brutes. The British are disdainful of the Irish, and vice versa. The French dislike Germans, who in turn look down their nose at Italians. And everyone in the world hates France.

We don't inhabit a world in which people agree to disagree, they simply disagree. The basis of their disagreement is not always something as overt as race, gender, nationality or religion. It can often be something as trifling as Mods vs. Rockers, Surfers vs. Greasers, or Teddy Boys vs. Punks. I could go on at length about some of the far more major schisms plaguing the modern world, but you're no doubt familiar with many of them; or at least anyone not living under a rock should be.

I predicted race riots in Los Angeles and in less than six months they occurred. I predicted Muslim riots and uprisings in France, and in less than a year cities there were on fire. The naysayers who'd said that I was crazy and apocalyptic were befuddled, and swore that they'd never have imagined such events could possibly have occurred in a thousand years. How could so many seemingly intelligent people have been so wrong? Simple. They placed a great deal of faith in a premise that was fatally flawed: Harmony.

There are quite a few idealists who fervently believe that harmony is the natural condition of life on earth. They're wrong, of course — idealists usually are.

People who can imagine the potential reality of a condition that doesn't demonstrably exist, are naturally blind to those events that contradict their imaginings. Or, if they acknowledge them at all, can dismiss them as mere aberrations.

And what of you? Can you point to a given historical period as being the last concrete example of the existence of real world harmony? Indeed, can you state beyond a reasonable doubt that it has *ever* existed as a genuine condition rather than a mere ideal?

If not, is there any rational basis to assume it remains a viable ideal to be aspired to? Or that it is closer to our grasp than ever before?

Read a newspaper lately?

DIVERSITY

"Celebrate diversity" we are admonished daily by those "militants" who choose to manifest their politicking and express their rage over injustice by means of the bumper sticker. And yet again we are faced with another of those modern conundrums. It would seem, at first brush, that those who truly revere diversity might stand opposed to the global monoculture whose *modus operandi* was to establish and impose the ideal of equality. Yet those who idealize the notion of diversity, are equally vocal in their demands for equality. Can such ideals coexist in the real world? Or are they mutually exclusive?

Diversity is a demonstrable fact, throughout both the world of nature and of man. It is an observable reality. And there is much to be said on its behalf. Why would one travel great distances to exotic locales if not for an appreciation of the differentiation that is to be experienced on every level, from culture, folkways, environment, food — *everything*.

Yet the same people who so admire what they label diversity, feel that our nation should intervene so as to bring other nations standards of living into line with our own. Would not the means and techniques of doing so alter — indeed destroy — the nature of any culture with whom we so intrinsically interfered?

There's the rub. Even in the scientific laboratory it has been said that the mere presence of someone observing a process, affects and changes the process due to his very observation. And he isn't even intervening. Save the lives of 100,000 people dying of starvation by providing them food and supplies, and in five years hence you might see 400,000 people on the verge of starvation. The best of intentions often have the worst of results. Unintended consequences.

The man who starred in a movie a number of decades back called "The Gods Must Be Crazy", refused payment for his participation, because his culture had no concept of money; of what it meant or represented. They had been self-sufficient and self-reliant for millennia. Money, to them, was an abstraction. The film's producers, grateful for his participation in the production, gave the man an open tab at a trading post in the area.

In a few short years, this tribal society's subsistence became reliant upon the trading post, and those born in the post-movie era were never initiated into the tactics of survival that were once second nature to their fathers and grandfathers.

Armchair advocates of cultural diversity in the U.S. are often those whose knowledge of different cultures comes solely from books — books sanitized for U.S. consumption. One of the young

Rockefellers was a cameraman who traveled to some obscure locale to film a documentary about the indigenous people in a region there. He vanished, never to be found again, and is presumed to have been cannibalized by a group in a neighboring region. Cannibalism too, is part of the rich tapestry that is cultural diversity.

Diversity, however demonstrable across the globe, is more an abstraction in America. A given culture exists as more a vestigial abstraction than a reality. It probably has more to do with food, than with folkways, traditions or identity. We all watch the same shows on television, are exposed to much the same music and so on. Our culture, such as it is, is defined more by economic factors than soul oriented values of any sort.

Whatever diversity remains is a vestige of something quickly vanishing. Group identity is supplanted by economic imperative, tradition is traded off in favor of prosperity. If diversity is to flourish in America, it would only do so in some Balkanized manner. Cultures would become more insular, not assimilating to the nation as a whole. This seems unworkable, but under capitalism, anything is possible. After all, it's propped-up a system like Democracy for well over 200 years.

IMPERIALISM

"If God truly created man and placed him on earth (and I have my doubts), I'm sure that He would want to see the place well run."

Cecil Rhodes, British Imperialist

Imperialism. We all recognize it as a dirty word, right? Mean white males traveling across the world with the sole intent of exploiting resources and whole populations. How dare we?

Well... Imperialism was part and parcel of the age of empires. It had more to do with commerce than with enslaving peoples. These days even the term commerce has an unsavory connotation, and yet commerce was anciently the engine of civilization.

In the Bronze Age ships sailed from Phoenicia to southern England to bring back tin, which, mixed with copper, created bronze. Stopping at each port along the way, these early merchants quickly realized that each culture possessed unique products, many found nowhere else in the course of their travels.

In Greece, there was an abundance of olive oil. In Lebanon, cedar. In other ports, perfumes, incense, silk, and so on. Soon, trade routes developed. They could buy goods for pennies on the dollar in one port, and trade them for something far more valuable in the next, and so on; from Phoenicia to Cornwall.

As the traders became rich, so did the ports in which they stopped over, and great cities grew up around them. Soon, ideas and knowledge traveled from east to west, and the tactics of civilization spread along with the goods shifted from here to there.

By the 18th century, the nation of Britain had mastery of the sea, and a good grasp on the tactics of civilization. Despite the fact that it was a tiny island nation — or more probably because it was — it set its sights on the world at large, with the intent of creating an empire. Not because the British were greedy, or had the military prowess to do as they pleased, but because their island lacked natural resources that were to be found in abundance elsewhere. Places in which they were going unused.

So the Brits set up colonies in far-flung territories, places considered "godforsaken" in those times. The English took away much from such places, to be sure, but they brought with them jobs, commerce, infrastructure, and more often than not, stability. Their territories were so far reaching that at one time it could be said that, "The sun never sets on the British Empire."

It's all too easy, today, to imagine the Brits as hordes of locusts who descended upon pristine locales, devoured all in their paths, and then

moved on. But is that the whole story? Didn't they also create roads and thoroughfares in use to this very day? Didn't they create wells that provided clean drinking water for towns and villages so that children might not die from drinking contaminated river water? Didn't they build and leave behind railways and modern means of communication?

Arguably, the British left in their wake not vast scars of devastation, but a higher standard of living, a framework which provided some means of interfacing with the modern world. India, once one of the most impoverished nations on earth is today one of the fastest growing economies.

We no longer call backward or undeveloped countries "third world nations", but rather *emerging economies*. Some, in fact, are. Many are not. Some aren't even close. Why then, is it seen as an evil for western countries to relocate factories to such places and provide jobs for those verging on starvation? Or to better their standard of living? How and why, is such practice denounced as exploitation? As "cultural imperialism"?

Go to an Asian "sweat shop" and ask the woman making the equivalent of \$12 a day whether she's happy to have a job or not? Then go to the Congo and talk to the guy who digs diamonds all day, every day, and considers himself lucky to earn the equivalent of two bucks a day. He dines on boiled roots, crappy broth and some sort of greens — and counts his blessings. A homeless man on any corner in the U.S. probably earns far more bumming change, and has far less to show for it.

Life exists on a sliding scale. We are not the measure of life on earth. There are many who have less, need less and want less. Some of the poorest people in the U.S. have a higher standard of living than the kings of ancient empires.

Those who proclaim most shrilly that the presence of western commerce in underdeveloped countries constitutes an unmitigated evil, have no qualms about folks from those lands immigrating here. Why? Because it's increasing their standard of living.

Is this not a dual standard? How is it that technology, commerce and jobs won't raise the standards of living in a place where such standards are non-existent? Yet an influx of immigrants who never went to school or can't read or write won't lower our standards? The answer? Because, in the minds of those who most vocally denounce our country, it is nonetheless seen as an all-powerful entity. It can do anything. And should do much more than it is. When the U.S. pledged \$30,000,000 to fight AIDS in Africa, many said it "wasn't enough." Huh? With the notable exception of a handful of oil-rich nations, the gross national product of most African countries combined is probably a tiny fraction

of \$30,000,000 and it isn't enough?

The very people who denounce the U.S. as being the police force of the world seem to feel at one and the same time we should be the nanny of the world, its nursemaid. They hate and mistrust the government, yet see it as an all-powerful force possessed of the power to solve any and every problem that exists, both here and worldwide.

Could this dual vibe be an extension of something more deep-rooted? Like, perhaps, a generation that rebelled against and hated their parents, but called at the end of the month (when rent came due) sheepishly asking for a handout? It's a decades-old dichotomy — mom and dad's generation caused all the problems, yet mom and dad can solve all the problems. Today the government is mommy and daddy. Its authority is resented, yet seen as absolute somehow. Even by those who resent it the most.

CAPITALISM

"The love of money is the root of all evil."

The Bible, 1 Timothy

I grew up in a generation for whom capitalism was a dirty word. It was a word, in the minds of that generation, synonymous with greed, mindless consumerism, keeping up with the Joneses and the oppression of the working class by an avaricious elite. Today, most accept uncritically the notion that capitalism is an evil. They equate success with evil. McDonald's is evil. Starbucks is evil.

Anyone who's grown up poor or lower middle class seems automatically to buy into this principle. Anyone who's ever worked a hideous job with a boss they hate accepts the premise unthinkingly. It seems obvious — self-evident. Yet how many jobs aren't unpleasant? How many people actually like their bosses?

As a young man I accepted this notion. But I never bought into the rhetoric of political "radicals" I knew. Their talk of the workers left me cold. A worker's revolution? I had serious reservations about the idea. What had workers ever done except to punch a time clock? I had no admiration for so-called working class values. I hated both my job and my boss.

At the time I worked as a janitor at a local university. The work was backbreaking and soul destroying, and I came home at night exhausted. All the while however, I clung steadfastly to the notion that a person with ideas could transcend this condition.

At some point during this period, I was offered a concert in Los Angeles on one of my two days off. Over six hundred people attended the show and I returned home with more money in my pocket than I could earn in two months working eight hours a day, forty hours a week. A light went off in my head. If I could earn two month's wages in twenty minutes, my faith in the power of ideas was well placed. I quit my day job.

My sudden revelation was about numbers. They never lie. If you work at Taco Bell and you're paid minimum wage, you're paid the same amount per hour whether you make one taco or one hundred. And you're working for someone else, generating income for someone else. Fine, if that's all you're capable of. Work is about providing a service. But if you have a service that people are interested in, you can provide it to 600, or 1000, or 3000 people at once. Recognizing this was a bit like understanding one of life's great mysteries. It was so idiotically simple. I wondered why this principle was not taught in elementary school, along with logic.

I subsequently came to view capitalism as a kind of magical principle. My admiration for capitalism and capitalists was vast. People who can run a business are people who earn my utter respect, people I view on a par with the greatest creative artists (most of whom, by the way, are capitalists par excellence). The Ray Kroc's and Donald Trumps of our world outstrip modern artists in their ability to recreate reality. They are alchemists who create real things in the real world. Things we want.

It is a common misconception that capitalism is about money, acquiring wealth and material goods to an unreasonable degree. It needn't be. It can as easily be about doing exactly what you want according precisely to your own standards.

Capitalism, we are told, is about selling out. It is about watering something down until it becomes palatable — saleable — to all and sundry. Nonsense. Only a naive or misguided person could confuse this with a formula for success. And many have. Leonard Cohen has never watered down his vision, nor did Tiny Tim. If truly unique figures tried to water down their vision for mass consumption, their audience might vanish. But few of them would consider the option. For them success is doing what they please, not popular acceptance or monetary rewards.

For a good many people money is not a corrupting influence at all. For those who possess it, it is an irrelevancy. It seems most important to those who desire it and don't have it. Those who generate vast amounts of capital could lose it all tomorrow and start generating it all again the day after. Those who win millions in the lottery will invariably squander it all in a year or two, and remain penniless forever after.

In the western world, prosperity is an abstraction, existing on a sliding scale. Andy Warhol said that if you were the richest man in the world you couldn't buy a better can of Coca-Cola than could be purchased by a bum on the street corner. Both could purchase the same experience for the same money. This, to him, was the beauty of America.

Few pause to consider that a good deal of our poorest citizens live in conditions of greater material luxury than the ruling elite, of say, Imperial Rome. Indoor plumbing, electricity, cell phones, plasma TVs, computers et al are things taken for granted in the modern western world. They oughtn't be. The poorest of our poor have higher standards of living than most of the world's population. All courtesy of capitalism.

Marcel Duchamp said that America's greatest artworks were its bridges and indoor plumbing. Frivolous humor? Not at all. Several years back I was at a fine eatery in Florence, Italy and asked directions to the men's room. It was outside the restaurant. Behind a rusty iron door was a claustrophobic cement enclosure, its floors soaked with urine. Toward the wall was a hole, over which one was expected to squat and defecate. I was at the very epicenter of the renaissance, ground zero of western

civilization, and I was standing on urine soaked concrete, shitting into a hole in the ground?! What's wrong with this picture?

CONSUMERISM

"I shop, therefore I am."

Slogan on badge, circa mid-1980's

We rarely hear the word consumerism without the prefix of mindless tacked onto it. More rarely still do we question whether or not mindless consumerism genuinely exists to any real degree. Does it truly constitute the vast blight that it has been portrayed as by the counter culture for the last half century or so? I wonder.

Consumerism is a fact of life — you and I are both consumers. We need to eat, so we consume food. We'd die if we became too dehydrated, so we consume liquids. It would be difficult to isolate many aspects of anything central to our lives that don't constitute consumption on some level.

Mindless consumerism is meant to be emblematic of the excesses endemic to capitalism somehow, yet the one doesn't seem to follow from the other. Buying a *pet rock* in the seventies may have been mindless consumerism, whereas wanting more than what you have (or, indeed, more than the next guy) is mere human nature; a condition that seems impervious to external circumstances, be they political or economic.

Visiting East Berlin before the fall of the Wall, I witnessed a strange spectacle. In a city whose streets were virtually deserted I came upon a vast crowd of people lined up around the block — waiting to enter a tiny store. I'd assumed they were waiting for some staple commodity that was in short supply: meat, butter, or milk. But no.

My host informed me that these people who circled the block were standing in line to purchase erasers. The small store had just received a box of fluorescent orange erasers from The West, and in a land where people had nothing, even a day-glo eraser was a status symbol. This then, was communist East Berlin's manifestation of mindless consumerism.

Later that evening, my host took me to East Berlin's finest eatery, a place so scaled up in its dimensions, that the diners inside the building were dwarfed in comparison. The floor space must have encompassed two square city blocks, and the ceilings were 2 or 3 stories high. The proportions were surreal in scale.

He insisted upon ordering me the best dish on the menu, which upon arrival he described (after thinking long and hard for the correct english words) as *birds hearts*. This, then, was self-conscious consumerism, communist style. It was a thousand-fold more ostentatious than anything I'd ever laid eyes upon in the west.

Crossing back over to West Berlin I was struck by the glare of neon and bright lights everywhere — a stark contrast to the gray severity of the east.

And yet, despite the self-evident disparity between the glitz and the grayness, nothing of the neon and flashing lights seemed showy or ostentatious.

At McDonald's one could get a burger with two all-beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, pickles, and cheese on a sesame seed bun (plus fries and a drink) for a few bucks, in virtually any major city on the planet. If socialism had accomplished such a feat it would have been a Marxist wet dream.

People with nothing (or very little) need something — anything — as a status symbol. People with access to everything all the time would be hard-pressed to find a truly viable status symbol anymore.

We live in an age where homeless people sleeping on the sidewalk are talking on cell-phones. One is curious as to whom they're speaking, and about *what*? Curiouser still is where do they plug these things in to recharge them? I wonder...

In Imperial Rome, eating a platter of flamingo tongues was self-conscious consumerism. In seventies East Berlin, it may have been a plate of birds hearts.

But what's the modern equivalent? Is there one?

In ancient times one could tell the ruling class from the poor, because rich people were fatter. Today, it is protested that our poorest citizens are fat because they can only afford to eat at McDonald's. If this is true, we're living in a new golden age. Today's poor should bow down to the clown and give thanks. They never had it so good in bygone eras.

WORK

"Work is the curse of the drinking classes."

Oscar Wilde

Upon first hearing the slogan "Work sets you free", it seemed both ironic and sardonic. Surely all work was slavery of a sort, something that only the most masochistic among us truly embraced. Right?

Then I heard "do what you love and you'll never work a day in your life". Sure, this rang true, but how many people do you know who are doing what they love? I wondered.

Among all those I knew, most based their lives on pure dumb luck. Most took whatever jobs they were offered and most hated their jobs. But life is about options. If you have a thousand and one options and take the first one offered, are you really exploring your options wisely?

Of course not. Everything in your life can — or should — be about tactics and strategies. If you were fighting a war you would employ tactics and strategies. Why not employ the same ethics in search of a job, or girlfriend, or *whatever*?

I chose to do so, and I examined my options. I was lazy and I didn't want to work. I had rent and I needed a job. Out of hundreds of possible positions, which required the least physical labor, gave me the most unsupervised leisure time and was the least like work? I took a job in security.

While friends worked their asses off, I showed up, punched a time clock and collected a check. It was like working and not having a job at the same time. I loved it.

I knew a science fiction writer who worked security. He sat alone at a desk in an empty building each night. His only job requirement was wearing a uniform. He wrote three novels while on the clock, had them published, thereafter quit and became an author.

I subsequently took a cut in pay and became an armed response agent for an alarm company. It was still security work, but still little work at all, and I zoomed about San Francisco all night in a patrol vehicle. While on the clock I could carry out international correspondence, have sex with my girlfriend, or hang out with Anton LaVey.

Every now and again I might arrest a trespasser or something, but by and large I was being paid to do whatever the hell I chose to do. This was maybe the best damn job on earth! Or if not, it was to me.

Almost universally, my friends pissed and moaned about their jobs, about how they hated their bosses. They'd tell 'em to take the job and shove it, first thing tomorrow, except for the fact they needed

that paycheck. The poor fuckers had made poor choices and bad, *bad* decisions. They all resented the fact that I'd "lucked out" somehow. If ever I reminded them of *choices*, or "tactics and strategy", the resentment soured to utter disdain.

When, during a low point in his life, Lou Reed revisited Andy Warhol, Andy told him that *work is the whole story; work is literally everything*.

And here we come full circle, to "work sets you free". For some of us, it does. If your work deals in ideas, it sends those ideas out into the world and magnifies them, and they in turn bring you money. The process involved enlarges your public persona, the thoughts you espouse and your bank account, all at once.

If, on the other hand, your job is flipping burgers — you just might be fucked. *Work* may set you free, simple labor or a job, not so much...

TIPS

I'm convinced that the only people who genuinely earn their tips are strippers. They put on a show and give it their all, if they didn't, they wouldn't earn their living.

When I worked for minimum wage at Taco Bell in the early seventies, I was never once offered a tip. Nor did I expect one. I was a teenager, this was entry level unskilled labor, and I got the same wage whether I made two tacos an hour or a hundred.

Several decades on, *everyone* expects a tip. The guy who spends all of three seconds pouring you a cup of coffee expects a buck or two tip on top of what is already a vastly overpriced commodity, a cup of boiled water and some coffee beans.

Taxi cabs are not a cheap means of getting from one place to the next, but your cabby expects a tip on top of the high priced ride. Your barber expects a tip. The bartender expects a buck tip on the three dollar happy hour cocktail he pours you, and unless he gets it your next drink might be a good deal weaker. Where, one may ask, is it all to end?

Even *cashiers* at a good many places expect tips these days. Cashiers don't even provide a service. Their performance is so perfunctory that their doing of it couldn't even be judged in terms of poor or excellent. They push a few buttons, the machine does the work, and they put your money in the till.

The whole situation is so out of step with reality that one wonders if the homeless man begging for change on the corner, is in fact in search of a tip? A tip for taking up space or urinating on the sidewalk, perhaps. And why not? It makes as much sense.

This whole scam started with waitresses, whom — we are told — "work for tips". *Why?* An organ grinder's monkey works for tips. At least the monkey is charming. If someone waiting tables in a profit making venture can't be paid a living wage, declare bankruptcy, for fuck sake. Why am I expected to subsidize the existence of those whose utter lack of marketable skills has them waiting tables?

Of course, some waitresses are great — old ladies with dyed hair who keep your coffee cup full and call you "Hon". Many there are merely mediocre and altogether unremarkable. Still others are so incompetent as to be out of their depth even in this entry level position.

Tips are like a form of welfare, shifted from the government to the populace at large. And the wider the circle of people who get tips grows, the more people who imagine they *deserve* tips grows. It's not about more or better service, it's about getting something for nothing — a uniquely American ideal.

Imagine my surprise, then, when visiting Australia for the first time, I discovered myself in a *land without tips*. Not even the concept of a tip. How did the Aussies manage to pull it all together: making a profit, paying a decent wage; and delivering great service — all without a tip? Simple economics, really. Bars and restaurants generate massive profits, and I have no idea when it became fashionable or even permissible to treat their employees here like indentured servants, nor why the policy persists to this day.

COMPETENCY

Walt Disney once commented that you can create the most marvelous thing on earth but it still requires people to make it work. And Walt wasn't simply indulging in pessimism, quite the opposite in fact. His implication was probably that people make the world go 'round. But Disney lived in an age before the term "idiot-proofed" was coined, or in fact needed to be.

In Disney's time things worked and people played a role in making them work. His comment is as true today as the day he first uttered it, only now its meaning has been inverted. Now its connotation is negative rather than positive.

Today, in virtually any imaginable field, the role played by people seems to constitute the weak link in the chain. From fast food to medicine, the story is the same. It's not so much that people aren't qualified for their jobs, it's just that they perform them with ever decreasing levels of competency.

The guy who screws up your order in a fast food joint or diner may just be stupid or lazy. In fact, he very probably is both. More likely, he hates his job, doesn't much care, and can't be bothered to pay attention. More often than not it's a simple mistake, one anyone might make. No big deal. Still, it makes more work for him since he has to redo it. You have to wait longer for your meal, and he's probably spit in it as vengeance toward you for *his* fuck-up.

The doctor in the O.R. isn't stupid. He's gone to College for at least 8 long years to get where he is and is being paid top dollar for his time. The procedure is straightforward and he's in and out in under 30 minutes. He's amputated a leg, and the whole process has come off flawlessly. Except that when the patient regains consciousness he points out that the wrong leg has been removed. Or there's the guy in Kentucky with an inflamed penis who goes in for a circumcision and comes out with no penis at all. I just hate it when that happens.

We'd like to imagine that high level incompetence is relatively infrequent, whereas low level incompetence happens on an almost daily basis. Perhaps so, perhaps not. In either case, the fact remains that somewhere out there exists a bullet with your name on it, be it in the form of a crappy meal, or something far more life altering.

RIGHTS

*"All men were endowed by the Creator with certain inalienable rights,"
U.S. Bill of Rights*

Rights, we are told, are ordained by God. Why then do men have to administer them, or grant them? How, then, could man infringe upon them?

If rights are an inalienable bestowal upon us by The Creator, how could we be deprived of them either by men or courts? Unless, of course, they are as much an abstraction as any of the other pillars of our contemporary consciousness, such as equality, individuality, or what-have-you.

If rights consisted of realities unto themselves, no one would be able to hand them out, and no one would have the power to rescind them. They'd constitute absolutes beyond the interference of men.

Such "self-evident" truths, seem to constitute the cornerstone of our modern Democratic world. If they are false, is *it* too false?

Certainly, no one seems to have much faith in *rights*. Our government least of all.

POLITICS

*"Politics is for people who don't know how to run their own lives."
Quote from 50's Sci-Fi film*

People who consider themselves political, who follow political developments most rigorously, are often those who view the political process with the greatest lack of perspective. Those who are most passionate about politics are least likely to view it with anything approaching a clearheaded point of view.

This is perhaps most evident in recent partisan politics. Few need be reminded that those on the left and right are diametrically opposed to the ideals of one another. Their repudiation of each other is both vocal and vehement — ever increasingly so. Detail by detail they disagree. Yet no one ever notices, or mentions, that in their fundamental political outlook they are in all respects identical. Mirror images.

Those on either side of the fence are precisely similar in their almost childlike optimism about the political process, in their faith that it has the power to transfigure both our nation and our lives. If only their candidate could get in, everything would be different. The true promise of democracy could be manifested, *once and for all*; or at the very least our country could "get back on track".

Back on track? Where and when precisely did we go off the rails? Were we ever on track? What president lived up to the promise of America and delivered the goods on it? Eh?

Most remember the Kennedy years as an idyllic phase of American history. They remember him as young, vibrant, idealistic and handsome (handsome is always good, right?). To this day many consider him the greatest president in the history of the United States. Do those same folks remember that it was he who got us embroiled in the Vietnam War, an event that would rip the nation apart in the decade directly following his death? We remember Richard Nixon as the worst president in our history, a dishonest crook. Does anyone recall that it was actually Nixon who brought our troops back from Vietnam?

Partisan politics is smoke and mirrors: false promises, empty platitudes and high minded ideals that can never (will never) be translated into public policy. At the most pragmatic level even if politicians sincerely and fervently desired the change they promised, even winning office wouldn't guarantee they could deliver on it. Once in office they find themselves hamstrung by laws and committees, by the house and senate — a political machinery set in place to prevent sweeping change and reforms.

But assume for a moment that such were not the case. Assume a candidate had no encumbrances or stumbling blocks whatsoever, that he (or she) were given unprecedented power to exercise absolute control... The sort of absolute power possessed by Stalin. Realistically, they'd still be incapable of delivering their campaign promises.

Why? Because today's campaign promises have no interface with reality. They aren't meant to. "A chicken in every pot" is quite real. It's something both attainable and measurable. Demonstrable. If it were a promise left unfulfilled, the public would know rather quickly it was a lie, empty words.

Today's politicians deal in vagueries and abstractions, in a currency far less subject to measurement or verification.

A voter strung along by such notions as "a thousand points of light" may be touched on an emotional level, even though he hasn't the slightest idea what it all means. He will never demand that the words are translated into realities, and indeed, how could they be?

Those who view the political process most objectively are perhaps those seemingly the least well qualified, those who both know and care the least about it. Though this seems counterintuitive, it is nonetheless rooted in logic.

In an age in which everyone has a deeply held opinion, in which everyone takes a side, perhaps the rarest individual is one that is genuinely apolitical.

Most are incapable of even conceiving of such a soul. After all, our world is defined by a countless number of hot-button issues, any one of which might determine the difference between liberty or utter destruction depending on which way things go.

Nonsense. Life plods on, always more or less the same regardless of who's in office. The sweeping changes promised by candidates don't quite materialize, or, in fact, never do. Life changes and seemingly evolves nonetheless. The economy improves or degrades, as it has always done, little affecting how we live our lives. In good times, our condition rarely seems transformed, and in poor times our condition is just as rarely devastated as a result. All in all, things change very little.

At the end of the day, this may be the strength of our system, not its great fault. Those who believe in partisan politics expect great change to come from on high and trickle down to transfigure elements of our lives. Has it ever happened, *ever*?

Imagine you were apolitical and had no such hopes. That your only expectation from your government were to attempt to perpetuate business as usual. What conclusion might you draw? That any change in your life was down to choices, decisions, and actions taken by you? That you could initiate such changes beginning right now, without waiting

for the external world to change? Has that world *ever* changed? Will it? Hardly.

Foolhardy men wish to change the world, as a precondition to changing their lives. What has one to do with the other? Wise men seek to change the conditions of their lives, having little or no concern with the world. Fuck the world, it is the domain of fools. Any attempt at exercising control over the world is an exercise in futility. Exercising control over one's life is the simplest of matters. And the results it yields are both immediate and demonstrable.

Politics offers the empty promise that others will change our lives. Realism informs us that such is not ever the case. Wisdom tells us that this is a game for others to indulge in or be distracted by; that all and everything that happens for us, is in the end both created and dictated by us. If we don't make it happen, no one else will.

Common wisdom informs us that the President of the United States is "the most powerful man in the free world". Wrong. Though such a perception is widespread, its vast acceptance doesn't render it correct, nor is it *wisdom* on any conceivable level.

The most absolute power granted to a president is to veto measures with which he disagrees. His greatest power resides in a negative, not a positive.

His is not the power of a Hapsburg or Stalin or Hitler, no matter how much people imagine he exercises complete control.

He is not a ruler or leader in any traditional sense, but rather a figurehead. His job is to be the public face of his administration. His primary duty as such is to take credit for what goes well during his tenure in office, or to take the blame for what goes wrong.

If he occupies office during good times, history will decree him a good leader — bad times, a poor one.

If a mere president were possessed of the power to make choices between prosperity and poverty, good times and bad times, would there ever *be* any bad times?

Pursuant to the assassination of J.F.K., the job of president became scapegoat, fall guy, and public whipping boy. No subsequent president has had the power to transcend this role. Ever.

Today, people remember the Reagan era with fondness. People remember the man with a sense of utter nostalgia. During his administration he was widely dismissed as an aging actor playing the role of president. His economic policies, universally lauded today, were at the time just as universally derided as being "voodoo economics". He is as missed today as he was dismissed in his own day. But more so.

That our system of government is a vast machine, existing beyond the control of any single man is obviously one of its inherent strengths. Our

founding fathers deemed it so. The premise represents an inherent flaw, and at the same time an inspired scheme by those founding fathers.

What we hail as our Republic is in fact an unwieldy governmental machine that exists on a scale such that no one could exercise control over it; one which could never be steered in any given direction, whomsoever was in the driver's seat. Therefore, the *driver* was ultimately irrelevant.

In other words, as the juggernaut of federal government surges inexorably forward, the president is not so much a driver as someone who's along for the ride. He gets aboard when the voters say so, and disembarks when they say. He collects a fee, writes an autobiography and dies before history has passed judgement on him. If he's lucky.

The watchwords of the French Revolution were "Liberty, Fraternity and Equality", concepts that had earlier become keystones of the American Revolution. But the founding fathers recognized them for what they were — not fundamental principles governing life on earth, but abstractions that appealed to human emotions... those of the masses.

Understanding the ability of a populace rise up and seize power from a small minority who exercised genuine control, the architects of the United States sought to find a schematic in which such would not be possible.

Power vested in a single man — a king — could cease to exist if the king were killed. The notion that power could be destroyed, usurped or *redistributed* was obviously anathema to our founding fathers.

So they took the watchwords of the French Revolution and attached them to a newfangled governmental dichotomy they'd concocted — a bastardization of a concept they knew about from their studies of ancient Greece: democracy.

DEMOCRACY (DIVIDED WE STAND)

"Democracy is the recurrent suspicion that more than half of the people are right more than half of the time."

E.B. White

Divisiveness is the cement that holds democracy together. Our hatred of one another is the sole condition uniting us as a nation.

Democracy may stand as something unique in history, a political premise designed wholly to pander to the dichotomous mind. A system offering choices based on seeming opposites, each of which favors corporations over the desires of their seeming constituency. Though the reader may infer that I'm contemptuous of this state of affairs, nothing could be further from the truth. I find it a brilliant deception.

In an Either/Or world we are offered *two* choices. Depending on which side of the fence we're on, the choice is clear-cut, that between right and wrong, truth and falsehood, liberty and despotism. Even if our side loses, one can remain bitter and dispirited for four years, then try again. If our candidate wins, we can rejoice; if they lose we can hate and brood. Both, at the end of the day are equally satisfying emotionally.

A cynic might say that democracy was mob rule, and it might well be if it indeed were based on "one man, one vote." Of course it's not ever that simple, is it?

The simple fact of the matter is that we possess contempt for all our leaders, for all authority, whatever our party affiliation. But when all is said and done, most folks enjoy being able to hate someone; being able to point to a scapegoat of some sort. We like to be able to say that all our problems (real or imagined) are the other guys' fault.

Do such problems vanish when a new figurehead takes center stage? Do they *ever*?

Democracy originated in classical Greece, that bastion of everything great, every noble impulse ever to inform or define the West. Who got to vote in those first manifestations of democratic values? Men. Men who owned property and other human beings. Not so different from our own early electoral process.

Andrew Jackson is credited with extending the democratic process to the common man, or at least extending the illusion of the process. It was still the electoral college who cast the decisive votes, as it remains today. Jackson even opened the White House to the common man. What a guy!

My knowledge of Andrew Jackson is limited to snippets from family history. He somehow cheated our family out of a tract of land called

"Chicasaw Bluffs" modernly known as Memphis, Tennessee.
The fucker.

Today Democracy remains a fine tuned farce. But a great one. Pure spectacle. People still care greatly about who wins or loses elections. The poor fools. They take great pride in their wins, utter despair in their defeats. But always, there's the next time. Hope springs eternal, and hope is the faith of Democracy.

RELATIONSHIPS

"Almost all of our relationships begin and most continue as forms of mutual exploitation, a mental or physical barter, to be terminated when one or both parties run out of goods."

W.H. Auden

A relationship (as you have undoubtedly been advised ad infinitum) isn't easy. It requires a great deal of effort from each side to *make it work*. It requires a lot of give and take, a lot of sacrifices. It doesn't just happen, both parties have to work hard and give it their all. *Bullshit.*

If *anything* in your life requires that much work, effort or attention, walk away from it. Immediately. If something isn't working, there's obviously a sound reason why.

Life's purest realities require no oversight, because they operate according to principles that are purely organic. Rivers flow to the sea. The sun rises in the east. Spring follows winter. In order for real things to happen, they require no intervention or sacrifices. No one is called upon "to work *hard* at" making them come to pass. Realities are self-regulating and self-perpetuating.

Only false constructs require our participation and intervention, to either impose them or take whatever action is necessary to make them work. Relationships, no doubt, have always been a bitch; even in those times in which they had more of a basis in organic principles. And that time has long passed.

Once, the masculine and feminine characters that defined our natures complemented one another, but even then, all was not right in paradise. A poet, commenting on the situation composed the following couplet: "Higamous hogamous, woman's monogamous. Hogamus higamos, man is polygamous." Even when our notions of the principles of masculine and feminine were pristine and intact, still there was discord. Even then, the sexes possessed different natures and values. They remain little changed to this very day. All that has changed is our recognition and understanding of them.

I've had astounding luck with relationships. They've all been execrable. They've all ended disastrously.

Some seek incessantly that mirror image that will reflect and complete us. A lucky handful might eventually find it. The rest are, perhaps, looking in the wrong place.

I'll concede that most people are indeed *incomplete*, some utterly so. I seriously doubt, however, that the stranger they drag home from the bar is in any way equipped to fill in the missing bits and pieces (except of

course the most obvious ones).

A simple rule of thumb is that most people are botched and flawed, far more likely to be damaged goods than the jewel in the dung-heap. Hint: jewels are seldom found in dung-heaps.

I've had some good relationships with great women, some great relationships with fantastic women, some horrid relationships with women who turned out to be far less, uh, stable than they appeared to be initially. And yes, most ended disastrously, which is good.

Why? Because the end of a relationship is by far the best part. When it's finally over — once and for all — the feeling of exhilaration that accompanies it is far more intense than anything that exists in the context of a relationship. An orgasm lasts for several seconds or so, but the sense of euphoric elation that follows the end of a relationship can't be measured. There is a sense of absolute freedom not comparable to anything else one could experience in adulthood.

Do you remember, when, as a child in elementary school, the teacher would inform you that you'd get to leave school several hours early that day, because of a teachers conference? That's the feeling of a relationship ending, times a thousand.

Traditionally, the formula for a contented existence was to get married, settle down, and live happily ever after. At present, the recipe for *living happily ever after* might necessitate skipping the first few steps in that equation. At least for me.

I'm sure that love and romance still constitute an exciting game of chance for a good many people. Some lucky fools may even hit the jackpot.

I'm equally confident, however, that the cards are marked, the deck is stacked, and the dice are likely loaded.

THE SEXES

For every nice sounding idea, there are a myriad of what we modernly term *unintended consequences*. I maintain that what we have labeled "the battle of the sexes" for more than four decades now is the logical conclusion of the so-called Sexual Revolution of the sixties.

The fundamentals of the sexual revolution seemed rational enough, even logical. Respected psychologists such as Wilhelm Reich traced our societies major neuroses to our repressed sexuality, while Freud likewise found it the base cause of most psychopathological behavior in individual cases. Given such a premise, the Sexual Revolution should have freed us from the shackles of sexual repression, allowed us to manifest our desires, and banished such demons as arose from denying our innate nature-ordained character as sexual beings.

Was the Revolution victorious? Hard to say. Its successes are difficult to gauge, whereas its collateral damage is quite evident. On the one hand you have the rise of sexually transmitted diseases (some deadly, some merely incurable); on the other hand you have a skyrocketing birthrate involving unplanned/unwanted pregnancies.

And what of the boon to mental health promised by doctors Reich and Freud? Again, hard to say. Do you imagine that the woman of today is less neurotic than those of, say, 1919? Or that the gal who brings a guy home from the bar, has sex within hours of meeting him, and never hears from the fucker again won't be bitter and resentful towards the opposite sex? Multiply that example by the millions, assume that each participant has experienced it *repeatedly* — over and over and over. Is such circumstance a recipe for well balanced mental health, or merely disaster?

In an age not long ago dominated by Christian orthodoxy, the notion that God was dead no doubt seemed revolutionary and liberating. Likewise in an era of sexual repression, free sex must have seemed a form of absolute transcendence. To figures such as Wilhelm Reich and Aleister Crowley, sex was undoubtedly a sacrament of the highest order — a holy union with the *other*, the *opposite*. But not every chump walking down Main Street is a Reich or Crowley; nor do they seem to possess the slightest inkling that man and woman are intrinsically dissimilar to one another on virtually every level. Indeed, even the evangelists of the Sexual Revolution seemed to have overlooked certain basics of the masculine and feminine natures.

The male character is not so hard to understand, as his nature is rather unwavering. He'll fuck anything that moves, then move on. The female character, though equally unwavering in its motivations, is altogether

more complex. Man, for the most part is defined by a single nature, while woman possesses a dual nature. This simple, elementary fact, seems to have escaped the notice of those who promulgated sexual freedom in the 20th century (perhaps because they were largely male). Sure, they recognized the male imperative to scatter his seed about, but missed altogether the *nesting* instinct of the female of the species. And therein lays the problem.

In a bygone age, a couple might meet, pursue a period of courtship, become engaged, get married, and then have sex. Today a couple meets, has sex, and (if lucky) a relationship might develop; though even then such relationships are more the exception than the rule. And even then, most such relationships are doomed, destined to fall to bits after a year or so. Why? Because every pattern of life on earth stands in opposition to them.

Let us return, if we may, to woman's *dual nature*. However intelligent, mature, or independent a woman is, a part of her remains a child; a little girl. However simplistic it may sound, this part of woman seeks a strong man — someone to take up where Daddy left off. This drive defines some fundamental aspect of who and what she is. And it always will. But within her dwells an equal and opposite imperative, one wholly maternal. It compels her to be a nurturer and caregiver. It compels her to take care of things and make things better.

Most modern relationships don't allow woman to manifest both sides of her character, merely one or the other. A recipe for disaster if ever there was one.

In the old fashioned model of male/female relationships, both aspects of the feminine nature were allowed to be manifested at one and the same time, because in ten or twelve months after marriage she gave birth to a child. Her man could be a paternal figure to her, and her maternal instincts could be directed toward her offspring. Everyone benefits.

Modernly the very qualities that attract a woman to a given man become, in the course of time, what she most despises in him. The woman attracted to a man because of his strengths will ultimately find such attributes to be domineering, controlling, and manipulative. The woman who admires a man's sense of independence will eventually resent it as a tendency toward being distant and aloof. The nurturing caregiver looks for men who are like sparrows with broken wings that she, with her love, can nurse back to health. Ultimately, of course, junkies, weaklings, and losers don't make for a good long-term investment of anyones time. Even the most maternalistic of women will sooner or later discount them as parasites, pussies, or both.

Why is the foregoing true? Because if one aspect of a persons nature is being accommodated while another is being starved or ignored, they

cannot be wholly fulfilled. And so goes the battle of the sexes. Couples are not so much partners anymore, but adversaries, each wishing to gain advantage at the others expense. Both play a sick game which, though not of their own creation, they are participants in nonetheless. And neither wishes to lose. Of course, neither ever truly wins — no one could win such a game. When all is said and done the Battle of the Sexes could be likened to a Cold War, a stalemate.

A good many excellent ideas should never have trickled down to fast-food culture, let alone today's attention-deficit-disorder culture of MTV and computer games. The Sexual Revolution may not even have been an excellent idea to begin with. In retrospect, allowing the lions share of the population to confuse reproduction with recreation may, in fact, have been a grave error. The casualties left in its wake are everywhere evident — like a Sherman's March through love, romance, relationships and marriage. In the coming years, its impact will undoubtedly be far more unpleasant still. The body-count left in its passing will be enormous, yet the bodies involved will not constitute those of the dead, but the living. And bodies have mouths and mouths have stomachs, both of which require feeding.

In a great many third world countries where Free Love was a *de facto* condition rather than a high-minded ideal, there has been massive overpopulation and even more widespread starvation. Some experts have suggested that in a decade or so the U.S. will be, for all intents and purposes, a third world nation. At such time, the chickens will come home to roost. Unintended consequences cannot be postponed indefinitely.

HOPES AND DREAMS

"You can hope into one hand and shit into the other — guess which fills up faster?"

Unattributed

Nothing is more boring than the hopes and dreams of others. Tedious stuff. Yet, almost universally, others love describing their hopes and dreams in great (sometimes excruciating) detail. They can talk endlessly, it seems, about what they wish to accomplish in life, or how they have some revolutionary idea that's never yet been done — or even conceived of. Sounds like pretty heady stuff. But it's not.

There's the bass player who wants to form the world's first rock band in which the bass is lead instrument. Hmm. Do you really wonder why no one's hit upon *that* novel concept heretofore?

There's the girl who wants to make "really smart" pornography, stuff that would "change everything." Really? Is there a market for smart porn? And what might even constitute a more intelligent approach to taping two people fucking?

In ancient Greece hope was seen as one of the most baleful values there was, a pestilence to human thought and reasoning. Why? Because it ultimately results in a disconnect between thought and action. The person who hopes for change in his life puts faith in such hope, rather than engaging in the active steps which might bring such change about.

Hopes and dreams, when actively pursued, are an attainable commodity. Even if we don't possess them, they more often than not exist as realities. But, of course, most realities are defined by still other realities, and certain very basic laws play an elemental role at every level. A homely girl with dreams of being a supermodel is destined for disappointment. A gorgeous girl with the same dream who goes through life hoping to be "discovered" and handed a contract and career stands little chance of faring better; even though she may possess the requisite requirements.

The natural beauty from a small town who travels to a New York modeling agency (portfolio in hand), may never be a high earning supermodel, but her chances at having a shot at it are exponentially higher.

So many people seem to take such solace in talking to others about who and what they *really* are (or imagine they are or should be), that it provides a level of emotional satisfaction which makes taking the steps required to *becoming* that seem secondary to it all. Or perhaps, at some fundamental level, most such people recognize that their chances are all

but hopeless; even though unable to admit it, even to themselves.

The bumper sticker vulgarity about how "Shit Happens" is popular because, to a certain degree it's true. Yet at the same time it's symptomatic of a primary misperception endemic to our culture, that somehow *life* is something that just happens — happens to us. We're its hapless victims. Witnesses to, and recipients of, every byproduct the unfolding of it's process dumps in our collective laps. It could be said that such a passive attitude toward life is unfortunate or lamentable. Yet don't we all only believe what we need to believe, and no more or no less?

Most people, perhaps all people, need to believe in their hopes and dreams; probably to an even greater degree than they really need them to come true.

We live in a world where people are identified with their jobs. Yet we all know the bartender, who when off duty and is asked what he does, will answer "I'm an artist" (even though he has never had an exhibition of his works). Or the book store cashier who will introduce himself as a "writer" or "poet", even though he's never been published. Or the record store cashier who introduces himself as a musician, even though his band may never have had a paying gig or released a single CD. But you should check out his MySpace page anyway — that's where the cutting edge music is *really* happening these days.

A great many people find the need to inhabit two realms simultaneously, they punch the time clock in the real world while inhabiting another, defined by their hopes and dreams.

The path to people's fantasies, desires and goals is a road that goes through the real world, with all its attendant harsh realities and pitfalls. It is a road littered with very real obstacles, unexpected detours, and dead ends. Expect a smooth ride and you're a dreamer. And most, along the way, encounter far worse than they ever imagined or bargained for. Not great tragedies, mind you, merely simple actualities. Very common realities. All too common, in fact.

The would be supermodel falls in love, moves in with some chump and gets pregnant. They're *so in love*, she decides to have his child. Months after the kids birth, the guy's on down the road, and she's a welfare mother shopping with food stamps (or the modern plastic equivalent).

Or there's the working musician living in Tempe, Arizona; and his girlfriend wants to move to Hollywood so she can be *discovered*. At first, things are fine. They both work part time to pay the rent, he joins a band, and things are going great. After six months, there's an argument, she quits her job as a stripper at Jumbo's Clown Room and takes off. To make rent the guy has to work full time, and as much overtime as he

can get. He has to quit his band, because he hasn't the time for it, and because playing once a month and splitting \$400 four ways could never pay his bills. Suddenly the fella's hopes and dreams are shoved to the back by real life concerns and demands.

Do these sad sacks of shit relinquish their dreams? What do you think? Of course not, they hang on to them more desperately than ever, even though the possibility of them happening is exponentially far less probable than ever.

Therein lays the beauty of self-deception. It's power is strongest for those who've lost all hope. Their defeat in the face of life will forever be their sole source of redemption.

The wanna-be model can forever tell herself, but for this *one* misstep, she'd be on the runway in Milano. She'll forever hate, resent, and mistreat the child she's given birth to, but will to her dying day cling tightly to the illusion of *what might have been*.

It goes without saying that this poor dumb cunt would never have been a supermodel. A person who can't get their mind around simple birth control, might be out of their depth dealing with airline schedules and photo shoots.

Same goes for the sorry son of a bitch who imagined his band headlining in arenas. Chances are good it never would have happened. But as he performs the job he hates to barely break even, the mere thought of it propels him through his day, if only just barely.

Our ideals, our hopes and dreams, are of necessity a form of self-deception; more often than not youthful fantasies. We can only dream big dreams during that time we lack the common sense and self-awareness to recognize they'll never come true.

Not everyone has the soul of an artist. Fewer still possess the talent or imagination to create *anything whatsoever*, much less, something interesting. Guess what? You don't have to. There is a modern conceit about expressing oneself that has snowballed into a full blown neurosis; and in the process has given rise to a vast cesspool of cultural mediocrity.

Why, at a certain point in the mid 20th century did self-expression become so appraised by folks who a decade or two earlier might have had the self awareness to recognize they had nothing, really, to express? Why, and how, did the compulsion for self-expression come to occupy a position so central to our understanding (or imagining) of exactly who and what we are?

Previous generations were content to get a decent job at a decent wage, date, get married, and carry on with the business of living a life. Utter anonymity was not a source of despair, but a given. Hopes and dreams, such as they were, were things well within reach.

At the end of the day a topic such as this is almost unworthy of comment. The person with strong appetites will always find the means to satisfy them. The person with strong desires will find whatever tactics or strategies are required to fulfill them. And nothing will disway them, or curtail their progress. A strong personality will manifest itself, come what may. In small circles or large, it will prevail.

COMPLAINTS

"Never complain and never explain."

Benjamin Disraeli

If you're going to complain about something to someone, please don't let it be me. It's not that I don't care, *per se* (I don't), but because it's an exercise in futility to complain about something to anyone unless they're in the unique position of being able to rectify the situation. And in regard to complaints, this is rarely ever the case.

If, for example, you and I went out to breakfast and your eggs were overdone or underdone, and you complained to me but proceeded to eat the unacceptable meal — who profits? Certainly not me. I've had to endure whining first thing in the morning (not a pleasant eye-opener). And surely you have not profited either. Your meal is still bad, though *venting* about it may make you feel better somehow.

Guess what? Most folks find the "venting" of others a great deal less tolerable than poorly cooked eggs. Guess what else? No one gives a fuck about your problems. If you really cared about dealing with such a situation, you'd address any complaints to the waiter; a person who just might have your eggs returned to the cook to be done correctly. It's that fuckin' simple.

Of course, bad breakfasts are a small problem, perhaps the smallest. The bigger problems, however, encompass the same tactics and strategies. And the same attitude on my part. If I can't fix it for you, I don't want to know about it.

Your stepfather blew his brains out? *Tough break.* Your car caught on fire? *That's a shame.* Life's unfair? *Welcome to the world.*

Other people's problems are like other people in general: they tax your consciousness and deplete your calm. Their problems, of course, will never be resolved, merely *rehashed* ad infinitum. That's (I'm sure) as they'd wish it. At the end of the day I care less about the fact that such problems are somehow fixed, as I do they be discussed elsewhere.

A wise friend once advised me never to burden others with your problems, unless it was evident they wanted to help. Great advice, but unfortunately, the fellow stopped short of completing his thought. He never went on to explain that most "others" were incapable of helping. Why? Because life can sometimes be unfair. Because bad things often happen to good people. Or because some folks seem to be nature-ordained losers. And the latter are easy to spot — they love to complain about things.

RESPECT

Even as a child I was an inveterate smartass, and even then, I think I possessed a sense of perspective. If my father behaved in a manner I thought foolish, I'd offer my critique of his actions. Such commentary resulted (of course) in his flying into a rage. On one such occasion he stated that I "had to respect" him since he was my father. "That's not true" I shot back instantaneously, "respect has to be *earned*." This only caused his rage to escalate, obviously. But I knew I was correct.

Those who demand our respect the most are often those who deserve it the least. The crack whores and white trash miscreants paraded before the public on daytime talk shows often justify their anti-social acts as reactions against being *disrespected*.

A rioter interviewed during the heights of the L.A. riots was asked why he was burning down stores in his own neighborhood. Seemingly caught off guard by the question, he pondered for a long while before answering: "It's about respect. We want respect".

Of course, respect *is* earned, not handed out like welfare cheese. And you can't earn respect by giving blowjobs for a rock of crack-cocaine, or burning down the supermarket you and your neighbors shop at. So while the desire for respect is widespread, a clear-cut understanding of the concept seems to be less so. And the means of attaining it, far less so still.

KEEPING IT REAL

A decade or so back this was a catch-phrase heard everywhere. It's still heard today and I still have little idea what it means. How many amongst us possess the means or criteria to determine what is or isn't real anymore? And real in what sense? Every variety of artifice is real on some level. Any and every idea can constitute a reality (of sorts) yet not represent a truth. Take, for example, reality T.V.

Perhaps the people on reality television are real, but only just. They are placed in contrived locales and in contrived contests and situations; and documented reacting to circumstances no ordinary person would ever confront in a million years.

Fuck "Survivor: Fiji" — let's see "Survivor: L.A. Greyhound Bus Terminal." Deposit these witless shits in the middle of downtown Los Angeles without money or cellphones and forbid them to go more than a block in any direction. Forget the made up contests and voting process — just let the chips fall where they may. Survival would come down to begging change and prostitution (for both women *and* men).

It would be abject misery, self-humiliation and great television, all at once. The winner would not be determined by alliances or the democratic process, but purely by the last man (or woman) standing. *That* would be reality T.V.

IT'S ALL GOOD

Indeed, it's *all* good. This was a popular catch-phrase a decade or so ago. I had no idea what it meant then, nor has the passage of time made its intent any clearer, or more intelligible.

It's all good: baby rape in Africa, drive by shootings, A.I.D.S., molestation of young boys by priests, mental retardation, genocide, school shootings, irritable bowel syndrome, lynchings, credit card debt, domestic violence, starvation, massacres, painful urination, the bird flu, drunk drivers, flesh eating viruses, ebola, e-coli, corruption, assassinations, child murder, tsunamis, mob violence, mass suicide, lone gunmen, impotence and war.

It's *all* good.

Know what I'm sayin'?

OUTSIDE THE BOX

People love the idea of "thinking outside the box", but don't seem to care much for those who actually do so. Why? Because it involves venturing into realms beyond their comfort zone, which virtually no one desires (much less relishes).

It's fine when *cutting edge* thoughts or actions belong to those already dead. Such things pass into the arena of mere abstractions, and cease to be realities. But iconoclastic ideas espoused by the living seem to constitute conditions which need to be confronted and dealt with. Or at least the general public seems to feel so.

Oscar Wilde is a British national hero — a great poet and author. His statue today graces a public square and historical plaques adorn those paces in which he once lived. In his own day, he was imprisoned. Once free he was driven from his native land to be exiled in France, to die a broken man. But hey, all that's in the past; let bygones be bygones.

The history of our world is a story of people who were pilloried, imprisoned, burnt at the stake, or made to drink poison for *thinking outside the box*. The list of their names could go on for pages.

So what's changed? Certainly not the desire to embrace radically new and different modes of thought. Few want that and far less could accept that. Most people want business as usual. Little more, nor little less.

What's really changed is peoples abilities (most peoples) to embrace whole-heartedly concepts and ideals that aren't part and parcel of their true character. Or are, in fact, diametrically opposed to their genuine character. Perhaps, at the most fundamental level, they understand instinctively that they'll never be called upon to adopt certain ideas so long as they possess the capacity to pay lip service to them.

After all, it's in no ones interest to live out new or radical precepts when pretending to understand or tolerate them will do.

Ideas can be controlled, those who espouse them cannot. Ideas can be defined, redefined, interpreted this way or that; perhaps even edited, censored or nullified. They can even become the subject of college courses and academic study, but only so long as those who originally elucidated them can no longer intervene.

Dead men have it easy, but the ideas they birthed during life are like an infant child abandoned on some plain in the Serengeti.

THE STATUS QUO

"Another Pleasant Valley Sunday, with charcoal burning everywhere, with rows of houses that all look the same and no one seems to care."
Pleasant Valley Sunday by the Monkees

For going on half a century the *status quo* has been anathema to rebels of every stripe. It was synonymous with stasis, death, slavery — a condition to be avoided at all costs. The rejection of the status quo came about in the baby boom era. It was a repudiation of the America symbolized by Ozzie and Harriet or Leave it to Beaver. But obviously enough, such programs never typified the America of that day. They were idealized representations of the U.S., abstractions to which most aspired rather than realities with which most viewers could identify on any level whatsoever.

Nonetheless, they became emblematic of an imagined vast status quo which successive generations have desired to reject and transcend. Doing so might have been a relatively simple process, since the image constituted a kind of false paradigm, even in the year 1961. I grew up in the era and knew no families living in two story houses, whose moms sported aprons and always had perfectly coiffed hairdos. Or whose dads returned home from work in suits and ties.

Ironically, each successive generation of rebels against the status quo, have left new varieties of status quos in their wake. Each have given rise to new paradigms, every one as mindless (if not more so) than the one they'd sought to destroy or escape. Each demanded a uniformity of belief, thought, action and lifestyle.

Yesterday's hippies, yuppies, militants, radicals, et al, have all given rise to their own milieus, their own status quos, most of which seem as lackluster by today's standards as does an Ozzie and Harriet re-run. And at least every bit as divorced from reality.

By the time punk emerged in the seventies, nearly a decade after the hippie movement, the hippies had already become ensconced as the new establishment; the pervasive ethic to be rejected and denied.

At first glance the punks seemed to do just that. They rejected the ideal of love, preferring violence and destruction. They were militantly anti-drug, a stance that garnered them some support amongst the working classes. As unruly as they were, many could understand their frustrations, and shared their anti-hippie attitudes. So far, so good.

All too soon, however, it was openly questioned whether these kids had a clear-cut agenda, or whether their attitudes were merely reactionary, an unthinking response against the generation that had come

before them?

Sooner rather than later, unfolding events answered such questions. Punks rather quickly adopted P.C. attitudes, a full decade before the term was even coined. They cared deeply about human rights, developed drug habits and so on. Despite the obvious disparity in hair dos and garb, they were the new hippies — almost instantaneously.

Unlike earlier rebel movements they never broke out, peaked and then faded away. They appeared on the pop culture landscape, set down roots and have (symbolically, at least) maintained a presence ever since. For the last several decades they have been little more than a vestigial youth movement, more fashion statement than substance.

In that regard, perhaps, they are as accurate a manifestation of the original punk spirit as one might possibly hope to find. And ultimately as meaningless.

Such folk constitute a status quo unto themselves, stretching back decades. But never, however briefly, have they ever constituted a threat to any status quo, whether real or imagined.

Today, Ozzie and Harriet are rotting in the cold, cold ground, and have been for a good many years. As their cadavers turn to dust, the status quo they so symbolized remains a living concept. Their ghosts (or the ghost of what they were imagined to represent) continue to haunt the psyches of successive generations, to this very day.

Today's status quo is composed of those who still seek vainly to vanquish the ghosts of yesterdays. For reasons already stated, it's an impossible task, of course; but everyone needs a hobby.

HYPOCRISY

"Hypocrisy is the homage which vice pays to virtue."
La Rochefoucauld

Bring up the topic of hypocrisy and people bristle. In fact, you'd be hard pressed to stumble across someone who didn't express heartfelt contempt for hypocrisy and hypocrites. Politicians are largely hypocrites whether you agree with their agendas or not. Saying one thing and doing another is almost part of their job description. They make promises they know they can't keep and once elected do whatever the hell they please. The public may be miffed about it all, but surely never shocked or even terribly surprised.

Why? Perhaps because hypocrisy is so endemic as to be the rule rather than the exception. It is not the sole domain of disingenuous politicians and miscreants anymore, it has metastasized and spread so as to infect and afflict the population at large.

Why? Because the world at large continues to pretend that the lofty ideals they proclaim allegiance to have some basis in reality, or in some way inform and define their thoughts, actions and lives. They don't. Nor have they for a good long time — if ever.

So, in effect even the most honest and well intentioned of people are *de facto* hypocrites; because they actively pretend the world is as they'd like it to be rather than as it is. In fact, most people do this (to a greater or lesser degree), undoubtedly even those who are the most sincere and forthright.

Bizarrely, we exist in an age in which high moral standards are still paid lip service, though such standards ceased to govern life long ago. Our *character* — our true nature — was never a reflection of such standards, even in those times in which our actual behavior conformed to them far more closely.

Perhaps, when all is said and done, our real problem is the naive expectation of a *lack* of hypocrisy; a belief that most peoples words and deeds will ever reflect one another. In point of fact, they rarely ever have.

The volume you are now reading was (in a round-about way) inspired by the "Meditations" of Marcus Aurelius. He was a philosopher, social critic and emperor writing in ancient Rome about certain timeless values and virtues. The sort of values addressed were things that every right-minded reader could agree were pure, true and good. But the fact that Aurelius felt the compunction to champion such values seems to indicate that even at that time, they must have been largely absent from the lives of men.

Many of those same abstractions hold sway over the mind of man today, and in the interim, a good many more have been added. Never expect most men to ever cease to pay lip service to high minded ideals. But don't ever be too disappointed when it turns out that a great deal of what they feign reverence for is revealed to be bullshit.

It's doubtful that hypocrisy is the cardinal sin that many in the modern world deem it to be. In a larger sense, most all men are liars insofar as they have no grasp whatsoever on the truth. In such context, honesty is a relative abstraction, and of little worth.

Yet again, ignore what people say — observe what they *do*. Actions alone reveal character, be it good or poor.

IDEALISM

"When they come downstairs from their Ivory Towers, Idealists are apt to walk straight into the gutter."

Logan Pearsall Smith

Idealism rarely has anything to do with realism. It is, by its very nature the antithesis of realism. Idealists often possess great passion at the expense of reason. They care deeply about feelings, but have little time for logic. Though it might seem less than charitable to classify them all as deluded, most are. Some remarkably so.

Yet profoundly deluded people often create quite an impact on the world, and an idea's viability or practicality play very little role in its appeal. Ideas that appeal to the emotions are embraced by the emotions, and are thereby exempted from scrutiny by the intellect — the litmus test of critical judgement.

If something can constitute an ideal, it can be expressed in a platitude:

Save the planet
Question authority
End racism
World peace now
God hates fags
Hands off women's bodies
Meat is murder
God, guts and guns made America great
Pro-life and I vote
Pro-choice and I vote
I'm gay and I vote
My country, right or wrong
And so on...

Idealism is usually a one issue topic, seldom complicated. Within its context, all the complexities of the world around us are distilled down to a single core perspective. A single defining ethic. Always, the idealist sees himself as a lone voice of reason in an unjust, unthinking, and uncaring world. A world in which the odds are overwhelmingly against him. And of course, they *are*.

Let's face it, there are a million and one so called "issues" in the world today, and many more millions of people who find themselves on one side or the other of most of them. Anyone who imagines his issue is central to the ongoing evolution of life on earth is sadly misguided.

Idealism is, at the end of the day, about the politics of identity. And central to identity is the desire to be right in a world where a good many others (or *most*, in fact) are wrong. To occupy a moral high ground. To imagine oneself *better* somehow, than the next guy. Though a strange motivation in a purportedly egalitarian society, this impulse lurks at the root of every imagined variety of idealism. It is selfish and narcissistic, fanatical in its single-mindedness.

Of course, no ideal will ever prevail — nor could it. No aspect of the world in which we live exists in such a manner that a single hot button issue is possessed of the power to alter all other issues in accordance to it. The idealist's identity is not invested in attaining his ideal, but rather in the outward show of fighting for it. Whether he knows it or not, he has already attained the goal he is seeking.

Today's idealist is the equivalent of yesteryear's true believer. They don't wish to be confused by the facts, however glaring. Cognitive dissonance is not something they care to recognize, even fleetingly.

Example: last winter I left my apartment in the midst of a blizzard to go to a supermarket at six in the morning. The temperature was in the single digits, and I had to spend ten minutes scraping the ice off the vehicle's windows in the freezing cold. When I arrived at the store, I spotted a strange figure, standing motionless amidst the falling snow, 4 or 5 yards from the place's entrance. As I drew closer, it was evident that this person had come out in the brutal cold to collect signatures for a petition of some sort. Wow! This was *hardcore*.

As a matter of principle, I make it a habit never to sign petitions, but decided I might make an exception in order to honor this person's extreme sense of devotion (unless, of course, their cause was utterly insane). Upon exiting, the icy cold seemed to stab deep into my bones despite my layers of clothing. Before me was a twenty-something young woman, whose teeth were rattling despite her hat, gloves, scarf, hooded sweatshirt, and thick padded jacket. She asked if I could spare six or eight minutes to sign a petition. Six or eight minutes in this temperature, just above zero, would be hellish; but I nonetheless asked what the petition was for. Her answer:

To end global warming.

REBELLION

Q: "What are you rebelling against?"

A: "What have you got?"

From *The Wild One*

The notion of rebellion is bullshit. It's been the dominant paradigm of the so called counterculture for 50 years or so, yet hasn't existed in any tangible manner for the lion's share of that time. Nor, for that matter, has a counterculture. So called manifestations of "underground" culture — art, music, movies, publications — are simply expressions of those categories which exhibit a far lesser degree of success than their mainstream counterparts. Commerce alone decrees whether something is mainstream or relegated to the underground.

In the late 1970s, a well known punk rock singer made a name for himself with an ironic anti-capitalist song called "Kill The Poor" and walked the streets of San Francisco in an "Eat The Rich" t-shirt. Today the fellow lives in a multimillion-dollar house in the city's Noe Valley; a house paid for by the very anti-capitalists who wore his band's t-shirts and sported their own "Eat The Rich" bumper stickers on their vehicles. Obviously, one can't go broke in the U.S. of A. selling platitudes to those who want to believe in them. Even more obviously; however easy it is to reject capitalism, it must be far harder to reject the results of its clear-cut success. One's bank book doesn't lie. For now, the same singer/songwriter who ironically penned "Kill The Poor" assures himself that he remains steadfast in his anti-authoritarian stance by affixing a "Kill Your Television" bumper sticker to his large-screen plasma TV. But the day perhaps draws near when the more hardcore of his fans storm his multimillion-dollar sanctuary and turn him into the main course at a punk rock barbecue.

In the '50s leather jackets became a symbol of rebellion. Why? Because rebellious behavior was synonymous with people who rode motorcycles, and motorcyclists wore black leather jackets. Marlon Brando became the archetype of the postwar rebel in *The Wild One*, and the image stuck. Flash forward to the late '70s. In the years that intervened between *The Wild One* and the inception of punk rock, the archetype of the rebel became more important than rebellion itself. Behavior and lifestyle took a back seat to pure symbolism. The Ramones sported black leather jackets, but had probably never mounted a bike in their lives. In their wake, a whole generation donned "motorcycle jackets" as a visible signifier of their rebellion, their outward rejection of mainstream values. But if mainstream values equated leather jackets

with rebellion, were they not actually more an extension of those values than a denial of them? Buying a leather jacket on mom and dad's dime while living in their house in the suburbs represents a rejection of nothing.

Across the pond, in England, the leather jacket became a symbol possessed of even greater potency. Why? Because it was an American archetype, and America remains a mysterious abstraction to the Brits. In England, punk was purportedly about "working class values," and being poor in a land with little or no job prospects. Yet all these poor punks sported expensive, brand new leather jackets with slogans or band names painted on the back. How is this possible? Simple; the kids bought the jackets with money from their dole checks. They were purchased courtesy of the British government; the same government they wished to destroy. Meanwhile, these rebels lived in their parents' homes, ate meals there and probably watched the weekly episodes of *Coronation Street* with mum and dad. Today, 30 years later, it's doubtful that much has changed. They have kids of their own, watch the same programs and eat the same food. Only now there is an excess of the sort of mediocre jobs such folks so mourned the absence of in the late '70s. Members of the punk band Chelsea who demanded the "right to work" in '78, no doubt got it in spades. Be careful what you wish for...

Hippies embraced peace and love as a means of transcending the unthinking consumerism of the baby boom era. Punks embraced hate and violence as a means of transcending the hippie ethic, and as a rejection of the emerging yuppie ethic. Of course, long hair or short, hippies and punks were one and the same. Both became yuppies when and if commerce permitted.

Today, erstwhile Sex Pistols front man Johnny Rotten dwells in an expensive seaside home in Venice, California, a stone's throw from the pier there. In his yard is a hot-tub. Does his worldly success render him a hypocrite? Of course not. But there is surely an abyss that separates his real life from the message which subsidizes the details of it. The youth which continue to purchase Sex Pistols albums may take seriously the message of anarchism; but in truth, John's success is more a story of capitalism. Selling the notion of anarchy to hundreds of thousands of consumers is still, at the end of the day, more a manifestation of capitalism than anarchy. In words, Johnny is an anarchist; in deeds, a capitalist. One is an abstraction, the other a reality. To know what he is, observe what he does. In truth, of course, Johnny is little more than a singer/songwriter. An entertainer.

Those who fancy themselves rebels place the ideal of integrity at a premium. Integrity?! Really? The idea has been in the air since *Rebel Without A Cause*, or before that, *The Fountainhead*. You have

the archetype of the lone, rugged individualist who'd rather sacrifice everything than betray their unique vision, or relinquish their integrity. But think a moment; how many people do you run across in the course of a day who you imagine possess any degree of integrity whatsoever? And how many people have you encountered in your entire life possessed of what might be deemed a unique vision? Most people's daily lives are bereft of unique visions and lack the need for integrity. Characters in novels and films grapple with such issues — the common man and woman only imagine they do, or wish they could. Another common theme interwoven with the notion of rebellion is the steadfast desire to never sell out. Again, most people will never even be presented with the opportunity to sell out. They have nothing to sell and no one wants to buy. Yet the idea remains central to their identity somehow. Since many people live their lives and practice their rebellion vicariously through certain celebrities, it's the celebs that may most suffer the downside of this archetypal abstraction. Faux bad boys are the saints of the New Church, but if their ersatz rebellion should sell too well or too widely they are quickly cast aside as "sell outs." The people harshest in their judgment of such types are folks who have never done anything whatsoever and never will. They purchase the product of the self-proclaimed outsider, imagining they are participants in the lifestyle or worldview being promoted. They aren't. Those most vehement in their opposition to selling out are largely those whose only options are futile attempts to buy in. They buy into abstractions and ideals. They do so by buying the products created by those who seem to embody the ideals and abstractions they want so desperately to believe in — to claim as their own.

The rebellion in America over the last half century is a media-driven masterpiece of marketing. Over-the-counter counterculture. Punk was an extension of the hippie movement, which appeared to be an extrapolation of the Beat Generation. But was it? If most assume the Maynard G. Krebs character from *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis* to be the penultimate manifestation of the Beat ethos, then the thread connecting it all seems fairly clear-cut. But Jack Kerouac was not Maynard G. Krebs. Jack was an arch-conservative. He was a lapsed Catholic in search of God. He was less a rebel than a man who desired to get married and live happily ever after. He desired above all a bourgeois conservative life, but lacked the ability to achieve even that. In short, he was a fuck up. A loser. He spent far more years living with his mother — subsidized by her — than he ever did hitchhiking across the US. Those who've followed in his wake hit the mark insofar as being fuck ups and losers, but lost the message of conservatism so central to his true vision.

Jack's pal William Burroughs was a trust fund kid, heir to a fortune from the adding machine company which long bore his family's name. His faggot-junkie lifestyle and trips to Morocco were subsidized by an inherited fortune, as was his literary career. Again, this doesn't necessarily render him a hypocrite or invalidate his literary works — but I'm just sayin'...

Neal Cassidy, the larger-than-life protagonist of Kerouac's *On The Road*, seems a figure destined for literature. But then so do mentally-unbalanced chicks. What seems romantic on the printed page or movie screen is often in real life little more than a royal pain in the ass. Neal Cassidy was obviously a professional bullshit artist and a sociopath; a marginal personality who managed to get through life on a combination of lies and charm. Great character for a novel, horrible guy to have in your life. Though it's endearing to know he could quote Schopenhauer, it's a shame that none of the Beat Generation took his lead. Things might have turned out differently if they had.

By the time *On The Road* came out, it was already a period piece. It took six years to get published and many of the events discussed within it were ten years old by then. The America that Kerouac had set out to discover no longer existed. By the time the book had generated an audience, interstate highways had all but rendered hitchhiking a thing of the past. If Kerouac had documented his post-*Road* life, it may well have been called *On The Couch*. He devoted his time mostly to drinking and watching TV in his mother's living room while she worked at a shoe factory to pay the bills. Sound pathetic? Well, maybe. Mind you, this was the golden age of television. Gin and daytime TV may have actually been far more intense than smoking dope in Denver, Colorado.

At the end of the day, Jack and Neal had the great good fortune of simply having good genes; they were born good looking. Let's face it, America requires its rebels to be photogenic. Outsiders are only interesting or compelling insofar as they're handsome. *On The Road* would never have sold had it been written by a pudgy nebbish or a pencil-necked geek.

There is an ancient bronze bust of the Greek god Apollo which — though it is well over 2,000 years old — resembles precisely a young Elvis Presley. The eyes, lips, nose and contours of the face are identical. Obviously, our sense of aesthetics hasn't changed much in two millennia. Nor has our capacity to confuse imagery with ideology changed much either. How can it be that an image, a face, a countenance, can seem to encapsulate and manifest ideals so seemingly intangible? And in a manner so seemingly real?

Why is a mere actor, 50 years after his death, still synonymous in the minds of so many with rebellion? The life of James Dean amounts

to this: he only ever play-acted three roles in three movies. Actors are by their very nature inauthentic. They pretend to be what they are not. Their stock-in-trade is falsehood. Pretense. Dean was a guy paid to wear a costume and mouth lines written by someone else. He was a guy working for a paycheck — no more, no less. James Dean had the incredible luck to die young. He never chose to live fast and die young, he just fucked up. He wasn't acting out a philosophy, just acting. It's doubtful that he even had a philosophy.

The Beats, for all their faults, were at least well read. They could quote Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, Dante, The Vedas; you name it. The hippies read maybe Herman Hesse or Carlos Castaneda, but most of their information about the world of ideas was gleaned from top 40 radio and long-playing records. In such a milieu, a literate figure like Jim Morrison seemed like a genius — the proverbial one-eyed man in the kingdom of the blind. Jim was so smart he could compare himself to Dionysus! Wow! To a generation raised on *Combat*, *Gunsmoke* and *Ozzie and Harriet*, a guy who took a class in comparative mythology at U.C.L.A. must have looked like the modern incarnation of The Oracle at Delphi. At the very least.

Flash forward a decade, more or less. The audience is even less well-read still, has far fewer points of reference. They've never even heard of Melville, Whitman or The Vedas; nor even of Hesse or Castaneda. Enter a brilliant entrepreneur who witnessed May '68 — or at least remembers it. Malcolm McClaren, who cut his teeth as manager of the New York Dolls (David Johansen calls him their haberdasher), resurrects the hyperbole of Situationism to promote the emerging phenomenon of punk rock. Music critics bought into it hook, line and sinker. As did social critics. England was on the verge of collapse. Punk was a response to this collapse. McClaren had tied it all up with a bow and handed it to the press.

The Paris riots of May '68 were, and still are, a wet dream to leftists. Student rebellions collapsed the government and youth took the reigns of power. Ten years later tourists visiting the Sorbonne could still see the visible signs of the rebellion — where students had pried bricks from the pavement to throw at cops. One of the leading lights of Situationism was Guy Debord, who penned the movement's manifesto, *The Society Of The Spectacle*. It maintained that in the modern world, very little was real anymore, that most of what transpires is pure spectacle — empty symbolism. Debord and his philosophy were obviously derided by those who "restored order" to Paris following the student uprisings. They conceded that the protesters were likely sincere, but following an "ill-conceived," "half-digested" philosophy that lacked any understanding of the world. Was it? Certainly it suffered from left-leaning idealism but

was the basic premise flawed? Are we not living in The Society Of The Spectacle? What Debord spoke of as a relative abstraction in 1968 is today a simple fact of life.

Malcolm McLaren took the Situationist images, slogans, et cetera, as his point of departure. Yet he consciously knew that he was marketing it all, that he was using The Society Of The Spectacle itself as a marketing tool. If Debord's contention was correct, then so were McLaren's actions. If society thrived on empty symbolism, he'd give it to them, explaining its meaning and collecting a check for so doing. And he did just that for a good long time. The critics ate it up. They loved it because it conformed to every falsehood and conceit they'd learned at the university.

But at the end of the day The Pistols weren't The Monkees, and McLaren was not Don Kirshner. Yet the similarities between the two were nonetheless eerie. As The Monkees proved uncontrollable, so did The Pistols. Neither group understood or appreciated the role played by their respective Svengalis. Both were little more than studio musicians tossed together by producers. In the '60s The Monkees were treated as seriously as The Beatles, The Doors, or Hendrix. In the late '70s, The Sex Pistols were seen as the gold standard of the serious rock band. Why? Because of marketing, plain and simple.

But the marketing of The Pistols is precisely what renders them irrelevant. They were intended always to be a manifestation of The Society Of The Spectacle, never a refutation of it. Nor could they be. From the word go, they were empty symbolism; never a true threat. If four or five years on, you steal your haircut from David Bowie or your riffs from The Dolls, who's threatened? In a better world David Johansen might kick your ass, but I'm not holding my breath.

Empty symbolism is the intellectual equivalent of empty calories. Where yesterday there were meat and potatoes, today there's an all-you-can-eat buffet of Twinkies, Ho Hos and cotton candy; and the populace grows fat and satiated on a diet of meaninglessness. Sure, this simile sounds all together trite and corny. I wouldn't even bother writing it, if it weren't for the fact that it's so fundamentally true. In terms of genuine rebellion, the meat and potatoes seem virtually nowhere to be found.

Bon appetite!

TRANSGRESSION

"... empty vessels make the loudest sound."

Plato

In the sixties there was a genre of films depicting a very gritty type of social realism. In them, people drank too much, and yelled too often and too loudly. At the time, such fare was viewed as brutally frank and unflinching in its realism. In reality, of course, very few people lead lives as neurotically charged and over-the-top as characters in a John Casavettes film. In retrospect such a genre constitutes more of an unrecognized variety of *kitsch* than of social realism.

Tomorrows kitsch already exists today (unrecognized) in the politics of transgression. The evangels of transgression will tell you they are depraved, degenerate killing machines whose mission it is to annihilate taboos and slaughter sacred cows en masse —until the streets run red with blood. That they luxuriate in filth and squalor, inhabit "the abyss." Their mind is a wretched cesspool, and their soul a vast poisonous volcano spewing forth blood, semen and feces.

Nonsense.

Ugly words on the printed page no more constitute an act of transgression than happy platitudes painted on a protest placard constitute realities of any sort. They are empty and meaningless. Genuine acts of transgression are equally meaningless, though some might constitute criminality. Advocates of transgression seldom make the transition from word to deed, except in the context of *the arts*.

Every now and again you'll see the performer who strips naked and smears themselves with shit, blood or some disgusting substance; but this hardly constitutes transgression in the context of performance art: it's sorta been its stock in trade for the last three or four decades. And too, things you see in the context of a gallery or rock venue are stripped of any visceral impact because such milieus are marketplaces where the commodity of transgression is bought, sold and put on public display. If you see a homeless man on the street inserting a Barbie Doll up his ass, it might be genuinely disquieting; see the same man doing the same thing in a gallery and you ponder the possible subtexts of such an act. It ceases to be real, passing instead into the realm of mere abstraction. And advocates of transgression very often deal in abstractions.

The decadence and depravity that sound so rebellious and glamorous on the printed page are often boring, if not pathetic, in real life. It is all too easy in words, to romanticize junkies, prostitutes, and degenerates. Having them as participants in your life is a different matter altogether.

Life's losers are seldom romantic or exciting, much less good company.

More often than not, acts of transgression in the real world lead not to liberation, but rather imprisonment. In a land and time where no amount of hyperbole, exaggeration or overstatement can constitute even a *thought crime*, real acts are still punishable by law. But very few proponents of transgression resort to real actions, when words alone can create controversy. Or garner attention.

Mark my words: in ten years or so, the literature of transgression will be a subject of lighthearted bemusement — alongside global warming and other such blips in the modern consciousness, all of which will make the hula-hoop fad seem a serious cultural phenomenon in comparison.

LAW AND ORDER

"When the state is most corrupt, then the laws are the most multiplied."
Tacitus

If laws were real they wouldn't need to be enforced, because if they were real they couldn't be broken. Try breaking the law of gravity. Now that's a law.

Laws made by man are rules reflecting the current status of his moral codes. As he alters and whittles away his morality, casting bits and pieces aside, his codes change to reflect it. Sure, the basis of it all has remained pretty much the same since the days of Hammurabi and Moses; but some aspects seem less related to morality than to ideas that go into or out of fashion.

In recent years, some laws seem like a decades version of the flavor of the month. In Boulder, Colorado a law was passed banning smoking in bars and restaurants. Then it was expanded and toughened, to not smoking out of doors, on the sidewalk. Now it is illegal in Boulder to light up in *your own car*. Presumably, it is still legal for citizens there to smoke inside their own private residences, but one wonders for how much longer.

When crime increases, tougher laws are passed to combat it. To thwart the increase in drive by shootings, tougher no-nonsense laws were rushed into legislation. Hmm. Aren't there already some pretty tough laws on the books having to do with *murder*? "Thou shalt not kill" is kind of one of the big ones...

Oliver Wendell Holmes said that the law should be stable but not static. And sure enough our ideas about the law try to reflect the tenor of the times. The snappy and to the point "thou shalt not steal" is an update from the original translation "Thou shalt not steal thy neighbor's slave."

Of course, today law is neither stable nor static. As crimes escalate, laws proliferate. But as serious crimes multiply, their numbers render them seemingly more commonplace. In the old west, horse thievin' was a hanging offense, plain and simple. A horse was a major investment, and stealing it could affect every aspect of a man's livelihood. Likewise, stealing a car was a major offense in the 50's, 60's or 70's. Back then the charge was Grand Theft Auto. Today the same crime is referred to as "joy-riding."

Since there are far more criminals than beds in prisons, sentences are altered in accordance with the "realities" of the situation. You might be far more severely penalized if caught smoking in your own car in some localities than the guy who decides to steal your car would be if caught.

In the fifties or sixties, murdering someone might get you life behind bars, if not the death penalty. Today you might get seven years, and be out in three with good behavior. Good behavior?! How much opportunity for bad behavior is there when locked in a cage under armed guard?

Some fear the coming of a new police state. If so, current trends don't portend such a situation. Quite the inverse, in fact. If things proceed along their current path, there may be exponentially more laws, none of which will ever be enforced to any meaningful extent.

Politicians will make a forceful show of getting tougher on crime, while judges quietly redefine what the term means. The prisons will still be full, just not as full as they should be.

It will never again seem like the land in which I grew up, a place with less laws, but more order.

POLICE STATE?

"This is the new police state".

Bumper sticker slogan

People who live in relative prosperity possess a luxury of which they have no awareness whatsoever. The problems which so aggrieve them are by and large problems that in no way affect them. Such problems, such concerns, would never constitute a reality with which they would have to grapple if they simply stopped thinking about them this very second.

People elsewhere don't share this same luxury. They haven't the leisure time to dwell on imaginary "issues," their problems are all real life matters. If you're hungry and have no food, issues of self-esteem are a meaningless abstraction. In Africa where rape is endemic, no one bothers to put up "public service" billboards stating "what part of NO don't you understand?". Those who denounce the U.S. as a totalitarian regime never saw East Berlin at the time of the wall, nor visited a good many islamic states which still exist.

The Dreadlocks sporting young "anarchist" who lives in his parent's home in the suburbs and calls police fascists has never been on a train in a communist country with genuine jackbooted thugs pointing machine guns in his face and demanding his passport — I have. The reality of a police state is a hazy fantasy to today's anti-authoritarian youth. Their closest brush with it might be watching an episode of Dragnet — and Jack Webb was one of the good guys.

People who imagine the U.S. as a harsh political landscape, have obviously never ventured beyond its borders. Most, perhaps the lions share, have never ventured terribly far beyond their parents house or the confines of whatever university they attend on student loans.

THOUGHT POLICE

It has become popular (even trite, in fact) to say that certain liberals are the new fascists — the new thought police. Really? Who, then, were the old thought police? The Inquisition? The Gestapo? The KGB? Do these New Thought Police exercise unlimited power, such as they did? Have agents *everywhere*?

In modern democracies, thought is difficult to control or police. Those who verbalize unpopular ideas can be boycotted or lashed out against. Under harsh regimes they can be imprisoned or even executed. But here and now? Gimme a break. Assuming we're capable of it, you and I can *think* whatever we damn well please. And more often than not, we can shout it to the heavens.

Don't like ass fucking faggots? There's a far right religious sect you can join.

Don't like homophobic religious zealots? There's an atheistic leftist group that you might enjoy.

Hate the President? Put another bumper sticker on your car and wait four years.

Believe it or not, your freedom of thought is not synonymous with *freedom*. Thought is a burden, an affliction. If it weren't, why would you concern yourself over the thoughts of others who may be in disagreement with you? Why might their thought constitute a threat to your own?

Of course, it doesn't. It's because we confuse thoughts with realities, and words with actions that we take either so seriously. Thoughts and words rarely intersect with realities or actions. If ever.

Thought crimes, insofar as they exist, are a literary construct. You'll find them theorized about in the pages of pulp fiction. And in hot pursuit of them, you'll find the only palpable modern manifestation of honest-to-god thought police.

THE NAZIS

*"Onto the flames / the works of Marx
Onto the flames / the works of Freud."
Lyrics from Der Fuhrer, a rock opera*

Never again — we've all heard the phrase and know to what it alludes: The Nazis.

Despite their having been vanquished in World War II, starting sometime in the late seventies, each succeeding decade saw the Nazis looming ever larger as an evil influence and imminent threat.

For a decade or two following the war they were simply the bad guys, our enemies who'd been defeated. For a brief period they became comedy relief, fodder for shows such as "Hogan's Heroes", and films such as "Which Way To The Front" and "The Producers".

Sometime during that same period — the sixties — the Nazis became an empty symbol of rebellion in the days pop culture. Both surfers and Hell's Angels took to sporting Nazi helmets and iron crosses, souvenirs their dads had brought home from the big war and had stored in boxes in the family garage.

Artist, hot rodder and entrepreneur Big Daddy Roth noticed the naturally emerging trend and began to manufacture and mass produce replicas of both the helmets and iron crosses. Roth, a Jew, had no political agenda naturally, he simply admired the design of both and saw their obvious appeal to the growing youth culture.

Soon rock and roll embraced Nazi symbology as a icon of rebellion, and figures as diverse as Brian Jones, Grace Slick and Keith Moon appeared in public wearing S.S. uniforms. In the glam rock era the swastika was sported by The Stooges, The Sweet and the New York Dolls. Even in the punk era, figures as seminal as Siouxsie Sioux and Sid Vicious sported swastika garb.

In the eighties, however, the Nazis became an empty symbol yet again. They became the antithesis of every value held dear at the time, the absolute inverse of anarchist ideals, and a direct threat to freedom and personal liberty.

In the nineties the term Nazi was probably spoken with greater frequency than it ever was during World War II. And its use seemed to grow ever increasingly haphazard. It lost its specific meaning, becoming instead a word applied to any person with whom one disagreed. Such practice had indeed been in the air for quite some time.

For the hippies, cops were jackbooted storm troopers and Nixon was

a Nazi. Later Ronald Reagan was branded a Nazi, and after him George Bush and then his son George W. Bush.

But Nazi is not a generic term, however much it has morphed into one. Words have meaning. If they are too widely and randomly abused, they lose their meaning, impact and power.

The word Nazi meant National Socialist. It pertained to a specific time, place and ideology. It encapsulated a trinity of ideas: German ultra-nationalism, anti-semitism and a totalitarian regime ruled over by a single figure who exercised absolute control. Do any of those criteria apply to Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan or either of the Bushes? Of course not.

In recent years there has even been an appeal on the part of certain concerned representatives of the Jewish community that there be a moratorium of sorts on the use of the term Nazi, on the grounds that the word was becoming so bastardized, overused, and generalized, that it was essentially becoming meaningless. And they were correct.

In the last few decades of the 20th century, anyone watching T.V., reading the paper, or talking to acquaintances, may well have imagined that the Nazis represented the sole major threat to civilization, democracy and our primary freedoms. Such folks were either all quite mad, or fundamentally deluded.

Guess what? There *are* no Nazis. Certainly there exist people who imagine they're Nazis, perhaps even some who dress up as Nazis in uniforms; but none will be kicking in your door asking for your papers within your (or their) lifetime.

Because of their status as an ersatz archetype of evil, anyone proclaiming status as a Nazi makes good copy in the newspaper or on television news coverage. A dozen "Nazis" protesting the local Martin Luther King Day parade will be the number one story on nationwide news coverage, receiving greater play than the millions who showed up in support of the day.

If you were to make a list of 1000 things that constitute a threat to your personal well-being, the Nazis needn't be included.

Our modern fears, the greatest of them, are little different than our contemporary hopes and ideals. Meaningless symbols and empty abstractions, the lot of them. Utter bullshit, in any real terms. They have been concocted to distract us from the very real details of our own lives. Details which must be tended to if we are to survive and prosper.

Factions on the extreme right of the extreme right might perhaps wish for a re-emergence of jackbooted thugs, who will kick the ass of far left liberals and restore the "true ideals" of our nation and its founding fathers. Factions on the far fringes of the left equally fear that some far right demagogue will seize power and forge the members of our military

into those very jackbooted thugs. Both camps are dreaming. Both are *hallucinating* in their respective hopes and fears.

The business of our nation is at the end of the day *business*. Above all, business as usual. The spectres of communism and fascism are both only that — ghosts. Ghosts of ideals and ideologies used to frighten a populace of children, in the same way ghost stories are used to terrify children around a campfire. So long as we live in mortal terror of a threat that exists as a mere abstraction, the mechanics of our daily lives proceed ever forward, both unabated and unobserved; never recognized or understood for what, in fact, they are.

In light of the foregoing, I pose a simple question: when will you have to fear any aspect of your life being negatively impacted by the ugly spectre of Nazism? Never again.

CULTS OF PERSONALITY

"God isn't a Christian or a Muslim. He's the victim of cult followings. He's a bit like Lou Reed."

Karl Wallinger, World Party

Why is it that the same seemingly intelligent people who buy into the doctrine of Aleister Crowley hook, line, and sinker are so militant in their repudiation of Christianity? Any genuine understanding of Christian theology must surely accept as a prerequisite the notion that, at the most fundamental level, it is an occult doctrine.

Those who would dismiss Christianity as mere superstition on the basis of its inherent irrationality, would — it seems — have to extend such a critique to the ideas of Crowley. Though Crowley possesses a veneer of common sense, so too does the vengeful Jehovah of the Old Testament.

Crowley said that every man & woman is a star. Either he traveled in very different circles than I do, or he is simply full of shit. Stars are few and far between. For every star there are countless planets, asteroids and black holes. One's far more likely to encounter the latter than the former.

Even on the stage and screen stars are few and far between, outnumbered by extras, stage hands, bit players, and walk-ons. Again the simile falls flat.

A truer statement might be "Every man and woman *wants* to be a star." Of course, they won't be.

Obviously, the problem with clever men, be it Christ or Crowley, is that they have a propensity for generating a great deal of appealing sounding ideas, ideas which invariably attract followers.

Followers, by their very character, are people who lack ideas. They are just bright enough, maybe, to recognize a compelling idea; yet more often than not lacking in the ability to either fully comprehend it or apply it to their own lives.

If one could compare Christ or Crowley to Gene Roddenberry the simile could be extended to their adherents. Christians and Crowleyites are no more authentically true to the spirit of their respective leaders, than attendees at a Star Trek convention would be qualified to speak on behalf of Gene Roddenberry.

This is the curse of great men: amassing a body of work and setting it adrift in the public domain. It will be misunderstood, misinterpreted, misrepresented, taken out of context and made a mockery of — and this by the very people who are it's most vocal advocates. Quite often those who understand a thing the least, publicly trumpet it the most.

This is surely the bane of the existence of anyone who's ever given rise to a school of thought, ideology, or "ism". The lucky ones are undoubtedly those who have passed away before their ideas gained acceptance. The unlucky ones must look at the effects of what they've wrought and cringe. It has to be like fathering a mongoloid child — knowing that you are responsible for it's coming into being, but feeling no kinship to it whatsoever. Only disgust.

Of course, the foregoing is based on the assumption (probably wrong), that those who espouse ideas and ideals actually believe in them.

If Christ and Crowley were to come back and see those who labor under their names, they'd be despondent. If L. Ron Hubbard were to come back, he'd be overjoyed.

Modern America, in fact the modern world at large, seems to possess a deep rooted sort of schizophrenia. Fame, wealth and success are prime motivators, things that the vast majority of people would love to possess in even the slightest degree. Yet almost universally, those same people have nothing but disdain for those who possess them in too large a degree.

While they take great joy in putting people on pedestals, they take greater joy still in seeing them fall off. The public loves nothing more than a good fall from grace.

The public seems to evince far more tolerance for those who possess great wealth and fame for no apparent reason. They might *envy* such figures, but their feelings don't seem to escalate to out and out resentment. *That* they reserve for those who are genuinely successful.

Ray Kroc is perhaps the quintessential American success story. He was a traveling salesman, hawking milkshake making machines, and turned a San Bernardino burger joint into a billion dollar international franchise: McDonald's.

The success of his enterprise comes down to a product which is universally loved. Order a Big Mac in Littlerock, London or Lithuania and you get a product of the same quality — and you get it equally quick, cheap and good. What's not to love about that?

Yet not everyone loves Ray or his franchise. Some equate Ray Kroc with, believe it or not, fascism. In Germany, McDonald's is equated with (I kid you not) U.S. cultural imperialism. Some passionately despise the chain. The sentiment seems difficult to reconcile with a visit to virtually any German McDonald's. The lines there are twice as long as those found in any U.S. franchise, bar none. Obviously, most Germans disagree with the notion that America is invading its territory via fast food establishments, or don't particularly care.

And one wonders, perhaps if the imperialist simile has a grain of truth in it somewhere? America would never invade Red Square, yet McDonald's erected a fast food joint there. Russians lined up around the block to spend a week's wages for the opportunity to taste a Big Mac. If this is indeed fascism, its tactics have altered radically. It's no longer "Can I see your papers?" but rather "Would you like an order of fries with that?"

Americans equate success with power, power with control and control with political domination of some sort. For them McDonald's is the business equivalent of the Antichrist. It is everywhere. And it is inescapable. The success of Ray Kroc is not something to be respected, a condition to be admired or aspired to — it is something altogether sinister.

But show them Paris Hilton fleeing a horde of cameramen and they are fascinated. They love her. No one seems to resent the fact that she didn't earn a single solitary cent of the millions she unthinkingly blows through. If anything they are slightly envious.

The public seems to save their resentment for those who have accomplished things they can't, things they imagine themselves hopelessly incapable of. It's not so much the fact that such figures possess what they don't, but the fact that such folks seem to constitute a visible reminder that they don't (or can't) measure up.

The guy who can't get laid resents the guy that has more pretty women than he can handle. The homeless bum in front of Trump Tower resents the doorman who chases him off, just as the doorman probably resents Donald Trump and all the folks who live there.

Resentment only shrinks to envy in those cases in which worldly riches are the byproduct of happenstance, rather than vision, diligence or hard work. Most people consider success something they could never conceivably attain through their own efforts, putting their faith instead in a truly American ideal — pure dumb luck.

How many times have you heard someone begin a proclamation with the phrase "If I ever hit the lottery, I'm going to (fill in the blank)?" To their minds this is the only imaginable way they might ever be able to have the sort of lives they only dream of. An abyss stands between the lives they desire and the means required to attain them.

Perhaps this is why they admire Paris Hilton. She was lucky, pure and simple, her wealth the result of an *accident of birth*. Many would switch places with her in a heartbeat. The only talent required to fill her shoes is the ability to spend vast sums of cash without giving it a second thought.

Only a lunatic, on the other hand would even conceive of trading places with the C.E.O. of a major corporation.

PRIVACY

"In the future, everyone will have 15 minutes of fame."
Andy Warhol

"In the future, everyone will have 15 minutes of privacy."
Boyd Rice

I believe it was J.P. Morgan who said that if you truly want to know a person, listen not to what they say, but observe what they do. Wise words indeed.

People now speak incessantly about how the government is infringing upon our rights, taking away our freedoms, bit by bit. The feds are poking into our bedrooms, and listening into our phone conversations.

Are they? Are they really?! Are you really so self-important that you imagine the government cares about who or how you're fucking? Does anyone? I don't.

If anyone listened to my phone calls they'd be bored to death. Or laugh their ass off. They'd get nothing sinister or subversive. Nor might they from you. So what's the big deal?

People love to talk about privacy as though it is a matter of utmost sanctity. Is it?

Our public figures aren't given an ounce of slack vis-à-vis privacy. They are hounded from gas station to restaurant, every second of every day, providing fodder for life's spectators.

Celebrities place themselves in a position to gain maximum attention, thereafter bemoaning their lack of privacy.

But how is it that the issue of privacy can become a major concern for the common man? Surely no one knows who he even is, or cares what he does. Do they?

He might entertain the notion that he espouses ideas that are dangerous or subversive somehow, but don't several million others? Aren't such ideas, more often than not, little more than masturbatory rhetoric?

Of course.

In truth, no one desires privacy, no one wants anonymity. What people desire is attention, recognition, fame. Most will never achieve it, most can never achieve it. They lack the means to do so.

Enter the internet. It grants the illusion of fame. A million people a day could view your site. Except that they have no idea who you are and your existence is meaningless to them. Still, there's the possibility...

So people make public the minutiae of their daily lives in the hopes

that someone will care. They publish lewd photos, discuss personal feelings and make public their most private yearnings. All in a forum open to anyone with a simple computer. All in the hope of escaping their smothering anonymity. All for attention. All for notoriety. And all the while, protesting their absolute desire for the sanctity of their privacy.

Man speaks of privacy but desires attention. He flatters himself wildly in the notion that anyone would find him a subject worthy of any sort of scrutiny whatsoever, or that his privacy is somehow something that might merit violation.

The truth of the matter is that the content of most lives constitute a matter of little interest to anyone, really; certainly not God, extraterrestrials or the United States government. Their friends and relatives have even less interest in the details of their lives. More often than not, they've heard it all before and have little or no appetite for more of the same.

INFORMATION

"Where is the wisdom we have lost in information?"
T.S. Eliot

As early as the seventies, a contemporary of mine began talking about what he called The Information War. In his estimation, those administering the *control process* were able to manipulate thought, action and perception by denying the general populace access to information. In his vision of things, if everyone had absolute access to all information, the mass consciousness would be transformed virtually overnight and reality would be radically transfigured. He was obviously full of shit.

Information, in and of itself is relatively worthless. It is not the truth, and seldom even a fragment of the truth. Neither is it synonymous with knowledge, or wisdom. It is not even necessarily *factual*. It's merely information.

The notion of the Orwellian authoritarian state is old fashioned and outmoded. Antiquarian. Yet people still fear it and still see it as a plausible threat. Indeed they see signs of it raising its ugly head in events transpiring today — here and now.

Grow up. The tactics of suppression and repression belong to a bygone age, supplanted by something altogether more sinister. We react with natural suspicion and fear to those things which we perceive as possibly oppressive. We greet with open arms those things which we perceive as being liberating. Keep in mind, it has been said that the Anti-Christ would not appear as a despot, but as an Angel Of Light.

Our greatest fears are forever misguided and misplaced. They reside in old fashioned symbols and archetypes. No one in the 21st century need fear jackbooted storm troopers kicking down your door. They no longer exist, nor will they. If they did exist they might well protect you from those more likely to kick in your door.

Big Brother no longer needs to kick down doors. He lives with you, and you've invited him in as a permanent resident. And he's not a despot, but an Angel Of Light.

Flashback to the seventies and my misguided colleague's demand for access to *information*. We're over a decade into the "information age." The sea change in mass consciousness has failed to materialize as has the transfiguration of reality. Don't hold your breath for either.

In fact, despite certain superficial conveniences, things seem to have gone from bad to worse — especially vis-a-vis consciousness.

If George Orwell had been a fraction the visionary that people imagine

him to be, he'd have turned his major predictions — warnings — on their heads. Rather than talking about a soulless monolithic state devoted to censorship, burning books, regulating thought and repressing sexuality, he might have suggested precisely the inverse. If he had, he'd have been right on the money.

Because we've been made to associate control and repression with censorship and lack of access to information, we view the inverse condition as liberating. Again, this is a masterpiece of marketing. Pure spectacle and empty symbolism.

If nearly a century ago religion was proclaimed as being the opiate of the masses, today the internet could be so deemed. The proliferation of information and imagery has supplanted belief as the defining ethic of our age. Like religious doctrine, information requires the suspension of disbelief — i.e. *faith*.

Though information may not be the Anti-Christ, it is, at the very least, a False Messiah. The internet represents the inverse of what it's imagined to be. It represents at one and the same time the very worst aspects of totalitarianism and the very worst aspects of democracy.

But surely, you protest, I'm over-reacting. Over-thinking things. The internet is only a *tool*, at times a very useful and expedient tool. NO. A hammer is a tool. If you need to hang a picture you use it to drive a nail into a wall, then put it back into a drawer for the next six months, or year.

The internet represents the polar opposite of the imagined Orwellian nightmare come true. Instead of censorship, instead of being denied information, we are inundated and deluged by it. It exists in such over-abundance that even the most well educated would be at a loss to determine the extent of its relative truth or falsehood.

Instead of the expected repression of our sexuality, we see the opposite. At the press of a button every variety of sexual excess can be paraded before our eyes in the seeming privacy of our own homes.

And there we go again with that delusion of privacy. Do those who imagine that privacy is some sort of sacred *right*, also imagine it can exist (on any conceivable level) in a context so public as the internet?! Grow a brain.

The head of the CIA has never sent an e-mail in his life. Why? Because once something is in cyberspace it never goes away. It has a half life beyond that of nuclear waste or styrofoam.

And those who fear that Big Brother can tap their phone — do they think of the debit card in their wallet? At the click of a button their movements could be monitored, and their purchases scrutinized. From how much booze they drink to the porn they view. Though they may fear the Mark of the Beast being tattooed on their forehead, they admire the convenience of the debit card in their wallet.

If you truly fear Big Brother and what he might do, you may as well give up and submit. He's here, and has been for longer than you care to imagine. If your fears are grounded in truth, there's only one possibility — *you're fucked*.

If, on the other hand, the government is a hopelessly mismanaged bureaucracy, each member of which is governed by self-interests; with neither the time nor resources to monitor what transpires (or doesn't) in your bedroom, you may just get a pass.

Until the final verdict comes down, you might be well advised to mistrust the notion of information, or at least entertain the suspicion that it might be disinformation. Or that the information superhighway might, in fact, be a disinformation superhighway, a detour, or a dead end.

INTELLIGENCE

"I have never let schooling interfere with my education."

Mark Twain

"Intelligence is almost useless to the person whose only quality it is."

Alexis Carrel

Intelligent doesn't mean smart. Intelligence means less today than it did fifty or a hundred years ago. In fact, its connotation is today inverted. Today, intelligence connotes book smarts rather than common sense and wisdom. It connotes a capacity to pass tests in a university, no more and no less. Since the modern college curriculum consists of so much abstract bullshit, those who excel in such a context should be viewed with suspicion rather than approbation.

Thomas Jefferson had no desire to be judged by a jury of his peers. His peers would mean lawyers — folks he disdained as book smart idiots. Jefferson trusted farmers far more, claiming they possessed a degree of common sense sorely lacking in most citizens.

It is a common misperception that a rising tide of ever growing stupidity is at the root of a society that functions less smoothly with each passing year. And though the perception of more widespread stupidity may be correct, per se, it is not what causes our major problems. Many of them can be traced to people we consider highly intelligent.

Institutions of higher learning no longer exist as a place where students accrue knowledge, but rather learn ideas. There's a difference. Knowledge represents an understanding of facts and data, whereas ideas can be true or false, right or wrong.

A person graduating college in the 1940's might reasonably have been expected to have a comprehension of Latin, ancient history, comparative mythology, literature, advanced mathematics, and the sciences. Their modern counterpart may have studied women's issues, film noir, and the plight of Native Americans. And of course, political science. The well rounded education is as dead as the Dodo, as is the well rounded graduate.

Those coming off the university assembly line give every appearance of being intelligent, and they are. Rarely, however, are they smart. These days, what passes for intelligence is a hodgepodge of half digested ideas, points of reference that lack any obvious counterpoint in the world around us; or, for that matter, the marketplace into which these simpletons (degree in hand) are unleashed.

Some years back I knew a girl who spent four years earning a degree in filmmaking, editing and production, yet she was hard-pressed to find

a simple receptionist job. I pulled some strings and managed to get her a job at the local PBS station. She turned up her nose at the opportunity, feeling it *beneath her*. The gig she finally landed was answering phones for a garbage removal service — and she was fired from it.

Again: intelligent doesn't mean smart.

As for me, I make no claims of being intelligent. I'm a high school drop out, and a miserable student at that. I hated my tenure at school and couldn't wait to leave. I was informed that without a diploma my life would be doomed forever. That I'd be a fool to leave.

But guess what: sometimes *smart* is knowing what you want and how to get it.

CHOICE

"Any customer can buy any car in any color they wish, so long as it is black."

Henry Ford

Choice, as such, does not exist. Man is compelled either by instinct or lack thereof to do this or that, one thing or the other. He calls the result of this process choice.

Every so called choice man makes is compelled by instinct — whether he knows it or not, likes it or not, understands it or not. And he never knows or understands it.

Where instinct is lacking, the intellect seems to take the upper hand. But instinct and intellect mirror one another. Any flaws inherent in a lack of instinct are reflected in the intellect, almost precisely so. So at the end of the day, instinct remains the sole arbiter of choice, even in its absence.

Freedom of choice is a much prized keystone of democracy, yet what does it mean in real terms? A visitor from Germany some years back was shocked to see an entire aisle in a supermarket given over to potato chips. "In Deutschland we have only a few chips, but here you have *an entire aisle!*" To his mind, this vast proliferation of choice represented a demonstrable manifestation of democracy in action. Democratic values glimpsed in *real terms*. But realistically, whether the brand you buy is Lays, Ruffles, Krogers or Our Family, the bags all contain the same thing — potato chips.

Therein lies the conundrum of freedom of choice — having numerous options is more or less an irrelevancy if the objects of your choice are essentially equivalent to one another. More often than not they are.

Quite frequently, our options come down not to what we find most appealing, but rather what we find least objectionable. Example: In the 70's the candidates for president of the United States were Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford. Such a choice, assuming one particularly cared about it, might best be decided by a coin toss. Such is often the case.

DELUSION

"Humankind cannot bear very much reality."
T.S. Eliot

It is widely imagined that if people could be dissuaded somehow from the fundamental delusions that cloud their thought process, they might be wiser, and therefore, happier and more well adjusted as a result. Think again. The truth of the matter is that most people's delusions are the only thing standing between them and a nervous breakdown. In a frenetic go-go-go world, peoples delusions are often the only source of solace available to them, short of psychiatric drugs or alcohol abuse.

The paradox of course, is that while these delusions offer a sense of respite to those who harbor them, they also constitute the source of a great many of the worlds major problems; all those jarring tensions from which we actually *need* escape. But not to worry. Chances are excellent that most of us will never get blown up in the bombing of an abortion clinic, or have our heads cut off and videotaped for broadcast on Islamic extremist websites.

Most peoples delusions result in altogether more benign outcomes and affect only themselves and those in their immediate circle. You can often spot such types from a mile away, and they're easily avoided. Or, you could be charitably disingenuous and pretend to agree with them. Why not?

Obviously, some of us will fare far better in the world with as few delusions as possible; just as obviously, now more than ever most people desperately need their delusions. Such fictions are all there is to define who and what they are. Or so they imagine (and I assume they're right).

P.T. Barnum famously said never to "wise up" a sucker. The truth of course, is that you *can't* wise up a sucker. Nor can you reason with Christians and liberals. Not gonna happen. What you can do is take solace in the fact that dumb people cling to dumb ideals — it makes them all the easier to deal with, and dispense with.

MEANING

"Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar."
Freud

Since first man possessed the ability to ponder his place in the cosmos, he sought the deeper meaning behind his existence. *Deeper meaning?* Before we proceed further, let's define terms — what do you mean, *mean?* What has meaning to do with man, his life or his living of it? And just where, pray tell, does genuine meaning originate?

Many imagine that if we could determine conclusively (once and for all) *how* we got here, it would supply the answers as to the *why*. How so? Assuming, for instance, God placed man on earth and the meaning of his tenure here is to go to heaven, the same question remains; to what purpose? Why? What function will he fulfill in Heaven (or, alternately, what might be his role in Hell?).

Many dismiss the theological explanation of man's existence as altogether too childish and simplistic, preferring the "more scientific" notion that his forebears were chimpanzees. *More scientific?* Though evolution, in a broader sense, may be a demonstrable process/reality, data revealing any sort of clear cut connection between man and the apes has never been found.

In a recent documentary interview, British Darwinist Richard Dawkins hinted that our DNA may have been engineered by a superior species. Is one to assume he's referring to aliens from outer space? Assuming such to be the case, it would certainly furnish the answer to the question of *how we got here*, yet still leave the same elementary question in its wake. If aliens created us, who created *them*?

Explanations and answers abound, yet meaning is nowhere evident. Perhaps man's fundamental error is that he seeks meaning where none exists or is in fact necessary. Or that he fails to recognize such meaning as does exist, because it exists on an altogether commonplace scale; in small details rather than large ideals.

Asking "why" may well be the highest calling of man, and it could equally be his plague. Such questioning could be a source of inspiration to the higher man and at the same time a source of neurosis to the common man. And yet it is obviously something central to the soul of man, something which goes back to the impulses of his earliest youth. Such might be a place where our understanding of meaning was not so much an abstraction, as a visceral response to the world around us.

As infants, it seems, two of the earliest concepts we get our heads around are WHY? and NO. The *no* bit is simple, because even before

we can speak or say the word we understand intrinsically what we like or don't like. Fed a food we don't like we'll turn our heads and hold our mouths tightly shut. We innately understand the concept of rejection before we know any words that signify it. The WHY? thing becomes the bane of a parent's existence, because a being who knows nothing questions everything. Or at least we do for a while.

Our questioning tapers off all too soon, undoubtedly because we assume the answers we've been given constitute a truth of sorts, and that those providing them aren't liars. Nonetheless, even as children, we have our doubts; yet proceed on with our lives as best we can. There is an odd sort of alpha and omega in all of this, because we start off rejecting much and questioning everything; whereas we end up rejecting little and questioning nothing.

The notion of meaning is an utter abstraction. It is at best a half-truth, and seldom even that. Stick to the meat and potatoes. Life is both far more simple and far more complex than the various meanings attached to it.

Some would have us believe that man is an irrational creature, compelled to impose order where only chaos exists, or meaning where there is none. But don't such absolutes sound all too familiar, more reminiscent of the false dichotomies that reflect the world of man than the realities which may, in fact, constitute something far more elemental? Of course.

Man is most certainly irrational, both in his behavior and belief. But this does not invalidate the fact that at some intrinsic level, he nonetheless recognizes (albeit unconsciously) there exists an order within his soul which has no outward counterpoint in the modern world. Not to worry. What man seeks is nowhere to be found in the modern world. And if, or when, he should ever attain his goal he will ultimately realize his quest was altogether wrongheaded: his victory is not to be found in attaining an understanding of meaning, but rather in escaping it.

PHILOSOPHY

"There is nothing so absurd but some some philosopher has said it."
Cicero

The notion that a good many people possess a philosophy of some sort, or that their lives are somehow ordered according to it is another deceit. It is false to imagine that actions and behavior proceed from ideas. They are above all a byproduct of character, first and foremost. A person's actions speak to their character, more often than not contradicting whatever ideas and ideals they profess allegiance to.

One can generally separate people's philosophies into one of two categories: post rationalizations and wish fulfillment. Where a person's words and deeds seem most closely to mirror one another, this indicates a sense of self-awareness as to their own character. Such people will seek out a philosophy which explains the whys and wherefores of their own nature. They will seek until such time as they find something which seems a close fit, and adopt that as their *personal philosophy*. At the end of the day, of course, that philosophy played no part in determining who or what they are. If anything, it represents only an attempt to explain or better understand who and what they are. In other words, it is not so much a philosophy as an exercise in post-rationalization.

When one meets a person who embraces a philosophy which is exotic, controversial or exciting, yet the content of their lives seem drab and ordinary, you've no doubt encountered philosophy as wish fulfillment. This is not so much about who or what we *are*, as it's about who or what we desire to be. More often than not it's a case of people espousing an ideology whose values represent the polar opposite of those which, in fact, truly define their lives. It's philosophy as make believe, as let's pretend. If such philosophies are part of a fairly organized sect or group and you have enough people pretending the same thing at the same time, the mutual reinforcement of their belief system can more than outweigh the cognitive dissonance between their lofty ideals and their all too real lives.

And a vast abyss separates the two. But the true believer wants — needs — so desperately to believe in flattering falsehoods that cognitive dissonance is easily disregarded. If it is ever acknowledged at all, it's probably as a symptom of how unfair the world is; insofar as it refuses to conform to the truth (as the believer perceives it).

Ideas are all well and good, but by their very nature are divorced from the realities of life. And the more widely separate from observable verity they are, the more they serve to warp one's perception of it, than to serve as the means to clarify it at all.

Philosophy has been bullshit for millennia, the domain of those who think too much and experience too little. Or, in fact, observe too little. The greeks coined a term that is perhaps one of the most lamentable of all ages: epistemology. It meant something like *thinking about thinking*. This is the downfall of philosophy and philosophers.

Except for Heraclitus (and a few others), there is little to be found in pre-Socratic philosophers that one can apply to their own life (or for that matter, post-Socratic philosophers). Mathematical genius Pythagorus founded a school whose pivotal gnosis was not to eat beans. Another early Einstein posited that an arrow in motion is not in fact in motion because it always occupies the same space. Great. And I presume that one isn't really dead if that selfsame arrow punctures his heart?

Flash forward to Nietzsche, a man who proclaimed that in taking a woman to the bedchamber, he must be armed with a whip. What?! Sex advice from a man who lived with his sister, never married, or had girlfriends? Do you imagine that his advocacy of the superman was any more well informed than his dating tips?

His ideas undoubtedly impacted the 20th century, regardless of whether they constituted eternal truths or masturbatory fantasies, a la Walter Mitty. Of course, no scribbler need be the living embodiment of his ideals in order for them to constitute a truth, but a seamless gap between word and deed goes a long way towards lending credence to either.

Philosophers, for the most part, inhabit the armchair. Most will never truly comprehend the extent to which their musings were either true or false, much less care one way or the other. They can't even conceive of the man of action who lives out his life in the real world, the man who may one day adopt their abstract ideals with the intent of applying them to life in order to change it at the most fundamental level.

We've waited 2000 years for the return of Christ. Longer still for the fulfillment of Plato's Republic. And the Nietzschean superman is notable only in his absence from the streets of any major city or small township across the face of the globe.

Do the philosophers who've shaped Western thought constitute the greatest minds in the history of the world, or merely it's most well respected bullshit artists? I'm just asking...

SOCIOPATHY

"I don't worry; worrying's not for me. Things that bother you, never bother me."

Livin' In The Sunlight

When you are born without the ordinary feelings and emotions shared by most other human beings, life looks different to you. It seems at times like a movie you're walking through, more a spectator than a participant. There is above all a lack of empathy with most of mankind, a sense of detachment. But with detachment comes perspective. The less you care, the more you know, and the more you know the less you care.

Imagine that you were unencumbered with the burden of being swept up in the emotions generated by our culture's imagined sources of great joy or great tragedy. Imagine not caring, I mean really not caring, who was elected president. We live in a country in which divisiveness is unprecedented, and emotions on both sides have reached fever pitch. People's intellects are dragged by their emotions into the arenas of hysteria and anger. The ability not to care is a luxury which allows one to make decisions based on logic and self-interest, rather than the feeding frenzy of public sentiment. Unfortunately, such freedom of choice doesn't extend to one's ability to choose whether or not they care.

Lacking a sense of empathy and ordinary emotions is often seen as a character flaw common to criminals, sociopaths, and serial killers. But who is more truly deluded, the average joe who cares deeply about his feelings and opinions, imagining them possessed of some tangible reality and capable of influencing real world events; or the honest to god sociopath who might prize his opinions above those of others, yet retains the self-awareness to realize they are only opinions after all, applicable only to him and only insofar as they prove functional? The latter doesn't care whether others share his point of view, agree or disagree. The former true believer not only feels that his opinions are real and correct, he feels that those who don't share them are at best misguided and foolish — at times evil. The true believer would forcibly impose his beliefs upon others had he the power to do so. The sociopath wouldn't. His self-interest supersedes caring about what others think. He can't be bothered.

Some varieties of eastern philosophy claim that true indifference is the highest state of consciousness, that it represents the purest form of transcendence we can aspire to on the material plane. But genuine indifference seems like something that exists beyond the ordinary intellectual decision making process. It requires moving beyond human

emotions, belief, value judgments and the like — all things that are pivotal to the worldview of virtually everyone we know.

The paradox that has largely defined my life, is that I've possessed great passions alongside an even more deep rooted indifference. My passions were connected to things that virtually no one else cared about, whereas my indifference extended to most things that virtually everyone else cared very deeply about. I quickly learned that most people will forgive you your eccentricities if you're a nice enough guy, or at least seem to be.

Interacting with other human beings is both the easiest and most difficult thing I've ever been faced with. People want you to feel their pain and share their joy, a problematic task if you simply don't care. Harder still when you don't understand which is which, or why.

Again, I quickly learned that most people were searching for some profoundly absolute response to their tales of woe or good fortune. For the entire decade of the eighties, I think my only responses to people's conversations were either "Wow. That's great", or "Oh, that's terrible". After all, it had to fall into one of those categories. Most of the time this worked great for me, but some times I got it wrong. I'm sure there are people in San Francisco who still think I'm the world's biggest asshole because I said the one thing when I should have said the other. Luckily, I don't care.

THE PERENNIAL DICHOTOMY

*"I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil:
I the LORD do all these things."*

Isaiah, 45:7

The worst things that have happened to mankind, or were indeed perpetrated by mankind, we call evil. But evil is not the cause of history's ceaseless maladies, but perhaps the *concept* of evil is. To be more precise, the concept of good and evil, i.e. duality.

The concept of good and evil allows whomsoever imagines they are good to commit acts of evil against whomsoever they imagine to be evil. Being on the side of right confers the good status, and those on any other side are logically evil. It's a basic assumption of duality — Either/Or.

But even such a presumption of so basic a notion requires a naive suspension of disbelief of sorts. Do you imagine that anyone at the highest levels of power truly buys into concepts such as good or evil. Do you genuinely imagine that wars are motivated by ideals, or merely the desire to destroy one's enemy and take what he has? Do they emanate from man's most high minded impulses, or his most base instincts?

Do you imagine anyone ever chooses to be the bad guy, or is even capable of imagining themselves so? Do you suppose that Adolf Hitler woke up one day and thought "I think I'll start a war so I can be the biggest villain of the 20th century"? It seems doubtful. The only villains who seem to possess any degree of self-awareness of their villainy are characters in television shows or feature films: Ming The Merciless, The Joker, The Riddler or Professor Moriarty. But life's putative villains aren't cartoon characters, or literary creations.

Except for serial killers and the like, most of those we collectively vilify as *bad guys* undoubtedly possessed the fervent thought that they were good people, crusading on the behalf of right. They may have been misguided, foolish, or even selfish and ego driven, but evil?

In the West Vlad the Impaler is emblematic of evil, in Romania he's considered a national hero. In Hungary there are monuments celebrating the life and achievements of Attila the Hun — he's even on some of their money. Talk to modern descendants of the Mongols, and no one has an unkind word to say about Genghis Khan, though folks in the region remember Alexander the Great far less kindly.

At one time or another in the 20th century, governments in Europe and the U.S. have supported or colluded with every major or minor despot there has been, from Hitler to Hussein, and from Idi Amin to Osama Bin Laden. This is not situational ethics, or mere moral

relativism, it is the politics of expediency.

In the politics of expediency, good and evil are a shell game, and the rules are forever changing. The rules, such as they are, are made up as one goes along.

Perhaps what's most flabbergasting about it all is not so much what goes on (that's business as usual), but that terms such as good and evil still possess any tangible meaning in this context. That the word evil can still be tossed out willy nilly and have the power to rally a mass of people behind one idea and against another.

The allure of the notion of Good and Evil is that it's a one-size-fits-all dichotomy, as seductive to our enemies as it is to us. And still every bit as motivating.

THE DICHOTOMOUS MIND

Our five senses are capable of infinitely more than we could ever begin to imagine. Human perception, in spite of its vast tendency toward mediocrity, exists on a scale encompassing unimaginable subtlety. We are told that certain native people living in rain forests can recognize upwards of one hundred subtle variations of the color green. And that they have a name for each. These are shades imperceptible to folks such as you and I.

It is also said that these same peoples can't perceive certain colors well known to us, but absent in their native environment. It would be easy to make this the beginning of a study of context, and the role it plays, but it is not.

Rather it is a study about the lack of our perception of subtle variation and what ultimately gave rise to the condition.

We don't live in a world in which subtle variation can be recognized because we live in a world defined by Either/Or. Things, events, qualities or values don't exist side by side for us, forming a cohesive whole. They exist as symbols to be categorized, fitting into one of two categories: they are right or they are wrong, they are positive or they are negative. They *suck* or they *rule*!

In short, we live in a world seemingly defined by dichotomies. We recognize the intellectual framework involved. It is not something which represents an abstraction to any of us. In fact, it is an elemental guide for us, something central to our understanding of what defines reality. Except that it is an utter falsehood.

We live in a world largely defined by false dichotomies. They are rooted no doubt, in our misinterpretation of *duality*. Duality, while obviously a demonstrable reality, falls far short of constituting a defining ethic of any kind.

Surely even animals recognize the contrast of night, day, hot, cold, wet, dry, light, dark.

The human recognition of such duality was to play a role central to their theology: everything in life could be neatly divided into one of two categories — Good or Evil.

Humor me a bit, if you will and dig out your copy of The King James Bible. Reread the first several pages of Genesis. I'll wait. The old testament possesses a huge degree of subtext, symbolism and allegory, right? Now reread the bits about Adam and Eve consuming the forbidden fruit. We've been told that the fall of man was a result of his disobedience to God, but that's not in the text. Not anywhere.

In fact, the fall of man seems to be equated with his *knowledge of*

Good and Evil — i.e. his recognition of duality. Previously he had lived in a paradise of perfection, free of wants or needs. Subsequent to his recognizing duality, he was forced from paradise into a wasteland.

Of course, I don't take the chapter and verse of Genesis as historic doctrine, but as an occult text encoded with certain subtextual truths.

But in the most profound sense, man has existed in a wasteland, from earliest times — and that wasteland seems rooted in the false dichotomy of the knowledge of Good and Evil; and the all encompassing paradigm it gave rise to.

Let's face it, most of life's details don't represent absolutes. They don't require us to take a side or form an opinion, either FOR or AGAINST. Yet most people do.

A mind oriented to dualities was not equipped to recognize totalities. A mind reared on the doctrine of Either/Or lacked the capacity to recognize that *which is*.

It's as though the architecture of thought, or of human reasoning were not constructed so as to permit perception of the truth. They weren't.

It's as though the dichotomous mind were cursed, forever incapable of manifesting any thought, belief, perception not reflective of the innate flaw that so defined it. And that flaw is forever the same, regardless of faith, ideology, affiliation, or orientation.

Its paradigm is always identical, whether reflecting the values of Christians, Muslims, Gays, Straights, or whoever. Even atheists and true believers mirror one another in the context of this. Ideologies, be they extreme left or extreme right, are manifestations of the same schematic in the dichotomous mind, more alike in character than dissimilar.

The dichotomous mind is a mind trapped in half. It is a mind incapable of perceiving totalities, because it is rooted in dualities.

Take a long moment to consider the foregoing. We are living in a modern world virtually transfigured by technology and its advances. And yet the primary defining ethic of our lives is a fundamental falsehood some *two thousand* years old?!

The realities that surround us, of which we are a part have no basis in false duality, in dichotomy. In contrast, they constitute totalities, totalities of which we are part and parcel. The Dichotomous Mind is the most primitive imaginable construct, one which has anchored man and his consciousness to the past even as he made advances, both intellectually and technologically.

An optimist might say that it is a testament to the character of man that despite the curse of The Dichotomous Mind, he was able nonetheless to advance himself both materially and technologically. A pessimist — or *pragmatist* — might consider it an indictment of man's character and awareness that in over two thousand years of so-called human evolution,

he was incapable of transcending or even recognizing the baleful circumstances of his condition.

Belief is the architect of thought, and thought the architect of perception. Perception is the architect of reality.

When belief is the byproduct of the Dichotomous Mind, every subsequent emanation of it is tainted and damned. Cursed.

EPILOGUE

And here, it seems, we've come full circle. Life's realities require mere recognition, never belief, and certainly not blind faith.

When one abandons belief, one turns his back on the world's primary falsehood, that lie that gives birth to all other lies.

Once upon a time, belief was a tool in our fight for survival. In the past it has been of great benefit to us, even when misguided or demonstrably false. Today's beliefs are far more misguided and demonstrably false than at any time in history, yet they lack the saving grace of being functional. We've forsaken notions of God and Heaven in favor of liberty, equality and individuality.

Are we more liberated as a result? *No.*

Are we more equal? *Hardly.*

Are we more individualistic? *Take a look around.*

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